

Evers selects Milwaukee, Outagamie counties for new youth prisons

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Gov. Tony Evers says two state-run youth prisons that'll replace the embattled Lincoln Hills facility will be in Milwaukee and Outagamie counties.

The Milwaukee facility will be built at the intersection of Teutonia Avenue and Mill Road, while the second facility will be located in the Appleton area, the gov's office said.

While the gov announced the locations for two Type 1 facilities, Evers' budget, though, is looking to build up to three and secure an extra \$90 million to do so, for a total \$115 million in funding to construct them.

A spokeswoman for the Department of Correction referred questions to the gov's office, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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Evers' announcement comes after lawmakers last year approved a plan to close Lincoln Hills by 2021. The plan, known as Act 185, created a study committee to develop recommendations and examine locations for Type 1 facilities, which will house the most serious juvenile offenders.

The Milwaukee and Hortonville locations picked by Evers were both identified by the study committee as potential sites.

Corrections and Administration representatives, Evers said, intend to work with local officials in both places to plan listening sessions for community input.

Evers has received some early pushback following the announcement.

The president of the Milwaukee Common Council blasted Evers for making a decision on the Milwaukee location without seeking input from local stakeholders.

“It is hard to imagine that a decision made without community input can bring about the results that the community wants,” said Council President Ashanti Hamilton in a statement.

And GOP state Rep. Michael Schraa, who has been working on legislation that would push back the closure of Lincoln Hills, said Evers’ selection of a site in the Appleton area “makes no sense” for one of the first Type 1 facilities.

He said the majority of youth prisoners come from Milwaukee, Racine and Kenosha counties, so it would be more appropriate to locate a second Type 1 facility there to make sure those offenders can be near family and friends. Schraa said Evers’ budget envisions a third Type 1 facility if lawmakers go along with his plan to move 17-year-olds back to the juvenile system. Should that happen, Schraa said, then maybe it would make sense for a third Type 1 facility in the Appleton area.

“I kind of understand his thinking with all the northern counties ... and so he wanted one centrally located,” Schraa said. “But just because of the numbers, the second one should be built in the southern part of the state.”

Evers’ budget calls for removing the Jan. 1, 2021, deadline for Lincoln Hills to close. But Schraa’s bill, which he said is in the final drafting stages, is only looking at a six-month delay. At one time, lawmakers working on the legislation were considering adding an additional three months if the Evers administration came back to the Legislature seeking it. But Schraa said that’s been dropped from the latest version.

The bill lawmakers approved last year putting the deadline in place also created a timeline for counties to apply for grants to build regional facilities they would run. Schraa’s bill would also push back that March 31 deadline to apply for the grants. But lawmakers aren’t scheduled to be on the floor until at least April.

Schraa said lawmakers are still considering ways to address that situation.