

‘UpFront’: Abele hopes to set national model for youth corrections

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Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele said he hopes the county’s plan to renovate its existing juvenile center into a newer residential care center for young offenders will become “the new national model” for youth corrections.

Milwaukee County, one of four counties seeking to create secure residential care centers for youth and children, is seeking nearly \$42 million from the state to renovate the Vel R. Phillips Juvenile Justice Center in Wauwatosa and add new programming.

The four counties are putting together plans for the smaller, regional centers that are slated to take young offenders after the closure of the Lincoln Hills School in June 2021.

“We want to set the new national model,” Abele said in an interview aired Sunday on “UpFront,” produced in partnership with WisPolitics.com.

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“We’re building on some of the ideas that work, but every bit of new programming that we’re adding, everything that is in our proposal, is based on a rigorous look at best practices around the country,” Abele said.

Mary Jo Meyers, director of Milwaukee County Health and Human Services, said the county’s new center would house and treat less serious offenders. The most serious offenders would go to one of two new secure youth detention facilities the state is planning to build.

“We will have the next level of kids, who have perhaps committed a variety of different types of crimes, but we know present less risk to the community,” she

said.

Abele said the county's facility will help save the state money by lowering recidivism. And it will help juveniles and their families because it will be closer to home for them than Lincoln Hills.

Also on the program, state Rep. LaKeshia Myers, D-Milwaukee, said her bill to prohibit pet stores from selling dogs and cats would help close a loophole in state law.

Legislation passed in 2009 attempted to crack down on puppy mills, but Myers said it has a loophole that still presents an "opportunity for puppy mill (animals) to come through that pet store operation."

The pet store industry has said Myers' bill will put some stores out of business, but Myers said she disagrees.

"I don't think it will put them out of business. I think it's actually an opportunity for them to work directly with the humane society, and work with verified rescues to have adoptions in their stores. So, it will not drive revenue from their stores, because you still have to purchase ancillary items for your pet in the local pet stores," she said.

See more from the show:

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