

Youth Justice Milwaukee: Latest monitor report on Lincoln Hill, Copper Lake juvenile facilities shows dramatic reduction in population

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Milwaukee, WI (July 9, 2020): The report of the court-ordered monitor at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake was filed today, in accordance with the settlement agreement from the 2017 lawsuit brought on behalf of the youth in those facilities by Juvenile Law Center, ACLU of Wisconsin and Quarles & Brady. The report shows historically low population following implementation of Covid 19 precautions, advocates see this as proof that youth incarceration is not a necessary part of public health and safety.

“The report filed today underscores the point that incarcerating youth has not been about health and safety – ever. It’s about criminalizing children. And it is a symptom of a lack of investment in the things that all youth and families need to be healthy and safe. Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake facilities will never be able to provide those things and they need to close,” said Sharlen Moore, Director of Youth Justice Milwaukee and Urban Underground.

“The pandemic has shown that a population reduction at Lincoln Hills is possible, and that having fewer youth in the facility is better. The state can and should take steps to continue to reduce, not increase, the population at Lincoln Hills and keep youth closer to their communities and families, as it committed to do by passing the facility closure law more than two years ago, ” said Karyn Rotker, Senior Staff Attorney of ACLU of Wisconsin.

“The latest monitor’s report shows that, even with historically low population levels,

Lincoln Hills still struggles to provide adequate programming, meet its staffing needs, and appropriately de-escalate conflict. These persistent issues reveal the fundamental flaws in the youth prison model, and underscore that Wisconsin needs to replace the facility with small, community-based alternatives that work and keep kids out of placement whenever possible,” said Karen U. Lindell, Senior Attorney, Juvenile Law Center.

“The ongoing challenges of transforming the culture at Lincoln Hills, the ability to divert and release youth safely during the pandemic, and the funding gap that exists for new secure youth facilities related to WI Act 185 underscore the fact that Wisconsin is at a pivotal point. That’s why Youth Justice Wisconsin is assessing the impact and action required to sustain the positive outcomes we are seeing from restricted use of secure custody.”, Erica Nelson, Kids Forward/Race to Equity Director, Madison, WI.

“The problems that lead to youth incarceration are preventable, and the Blueprint for Peace contains strategies for ensuring that youth, families and communities have what they need to thrive. We must do a better job of ensuring that resources are invested in prevention on the front end to avoid the ineffective practice of locking young people up on the back end”, stated TeAngelo Cargile, Jr, City of Milwaukee Office of Violence Prevention, Youth Prevention Coordinator.

“We can, and have, found safe alternatives to release some youth from incarceration in this difficult time. It begs the question that, if we can do it now, why haven’t we been more judicious about these alternatives all along?” said Mark Mertens, administrator of the Division of Youth and Family Services for Milwaukee County, Wisconsin.

For Sharlen Moore, the direction is clear: “With the deadline to close Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake facilities on the horizon and a local commitment to supporting youth and families better, Wisconsin needs to invest in what youth need to be successful. We need to notice what stands in our way of doing that, move ahead, and remove barriers as we go.”