

Court-ordered monitor reports improvements at state's youth prisons

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The state's troubled youth prisons are showing signs of improvement in at least some key problem areas, according to the latest court-ordered monitor's report.

Monitor Teresa Abreu in her 11th report, which covers Oct. 14 through Sept. 30, noted improvement from partial compliance to substantial compliance in some areas, bringing to 12 areas in substantial compliance. Most of the improvements came from areas related to strip searches because the facility maintained its youth inmate search policy implemented during the last reporting period.

Abreu also noted there were no youth inmates strip searched during the latest reporting period.

After her Oct. 14 visit to Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake and multiple virtual and in-person meetings, she also noted improvements in youth and staff attitudes and morale since the last reporting period. Abreu said increased structure for youth inmates through educational and other activities led to less antisocial behavior among youth.

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She also said youth complaints at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake over staff, food, education and confinement in the facilities present in the last report were absent this period.

"Youth did not make any of these complaints this site visit," she said. "In fact, several youths spoke to the Monitoring team and indicated that the facility culture, programs, and safety is much better now compared to their previous commitments

to the facility.”

Corrections Secretary Kevin Carr praised the progress.

“The steps this administration has taken at Lincoln Hills School/Copper Lake School have not always been easy,” he said in a statement. “However, I believe they were necessary to transform the schools into a facility where youth are provided evidence-based treatment and education, not just punishment.”

An ACLU Wisconsin spokeswoman told WisPolitics.com the state should still close the facilities, despite the noted improvements.

“Rather than continuing to waste tax dollars on building new prisons and incarcerating youth, we should be focused on investing in more effective community-based alternatives and services that actually meet the needs of youth held in Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake,” she said in an email.

See the report:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/11th-Monitor-Report-as-Filed-111621.pdf>

See the DOC release:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/2021/dept-of-corrections-monitor-notes-significant-improvements-in-atmosphere-and-morale-at-lincoln-hills-copper-lake/>