

Youth prisons' staff vacancy rate exceeds systemwide rate

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Since mid-February, staff vacancy rates at the state's juvenile correctional facilities have climbed twice as fast as those at Wisconsin's adult institutions, according to records obtained by WisPolitics.com.

The increase means the vacancy rate at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake is now double that of the state's adult institutions systemwide.

The higher staff vacancy rates come as the youth prisons face scrutiny from both a court-ordered monitor and the public over safety concerns for youth inmates and staff. At the same time, inmate numbers at the youth prisons have declined.

DOC spokesman John Beard said the department will be hiring at least a few more staff for the youth prisons and it will ramp up a recruitment campaign this year in an effort to address the overall DOC staff vacancy issue.

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But Beard also said some factors are out of the department's control.

"Like many agencies across the nation, Wisconsin DOC is also finding a lot of competition from the private sector, which is also looking for workers and, in many cases, can offer better pay," he said in an email.

At least some of the state's prisons have been plagued by staffing problems in recent years. But Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake have seen a more dramatic change than most other facilities over the last four months.

The most recent records from the Department of Corrections show the staff vacancy rate at the youth prisons climbed from 25.25 percent in mid-February to 32.01

percent in May and has remained there through the beginning of June.

The system-wide vacancy rates for adult facility equivalent positions were 15.23 percent in mid-February, climbing to 16.83 percent during the first week of June.

That means the youth prisons have lost 10 full-time youth counselors since mid-February. By comparison, adult institutions lost more than 75 officers and sergeants, the adult facility equivalents to youth counselors and youth counselor supervisors.

At the same time, the population at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake has dropped from more than 100 youth inmates before the pandemic to 49 males and six females, according to the latest DOC report.

There are more than 19,400 inmates in Wisconsin's adult institutions.

Read more in the WisPolitics.com [FRI REPORT](#).