

# ACLU: Ten Wisconsin organizations call on Gov. Evers to save Chaney Center as he signs bill to close Lincoln Hills

Posted on Friday, Mar 18, 2022

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MILWAUKEE — The ACLU of Wisconsin, Juvenile Law Center, and eight other Wisconsin organizations today called on Gov. Tony Evers to consider alternative sites for a new youth prison, rather than the Felmers O. Chaney Center site, after signing Senate Bill 520.

Senate Bill 520 would provide \$41 million to construct a new type-1 juvenile correctional facility in Milwaukee County, providing a path to closing Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake schools in rural Irma.

“We celebrate this monumental step forward to closing these failed and oversized institutions,” said Kate Burdick, senior attorney at Juvenile Law Center. “It is long past time to listen to the young people who have repeatedly expressed concerns about mistreatment and separation from their families. Despite progress made through the class action lawsuit, it is clear the only real solution to the persistent problems at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake is to close their doors and provide youth with humane supports close to home.”

But, closing Lincoln Hills and establishing a youth facility in Milwaukee should not come at the expense of the Chaney Center, which provides important pre-release services to Milwaukee men. These services are essential to successfully and fully reintegrating incarcerated individuals into their communities.

The Chaney Center provides Milwaukee-area men with various pre-release services

that give them the skills and support they need to rejoin their communities successfully. These services include substance abuse and mental health treatment, employment and housing support, fatherhood programming, public speaking and volunteering opportunities, and a supportive community.

“There is no doubt that the youth at Lincoln Hills must be brought closer to home, but closing the Chaney Center in the process is unnecessary, misguided, and unfair to the men who benefit from the vital reentry services currently provided there,” said Sharlen Moore of Urban Underground/Youth Justice Milwaukee. “Incarcerated adults in the Chaney Center deserve support just as the youth at Lincoln Hills do, and there is no reason we need to move forward with a proposal which forces us to choose between the two. We can have both.”

The Felmers Chaney Advisory Board, a group of community advocates that oppose the Chaney Center’s demolition but support Lincoln Hills’ closure, has spent months working to identify viable alternative locations that would meet the DOC’s criteria for a type 1 juvenile facility in Milwaukee.

“Closing Lincoln Hills does not mean the Chaney Center should have to close with it,” said Abby Kanyer, community engagement manager of the ACLU of Wisconsin. “Community members in Milwaukee have found viable solutions that satisfy the state’s requirements for a Milwaukee juvenile facility while allowing for the Chaney Center to remain open. Committed Milwaukeeans came together to figure out a way to protect young people without sacrificing reentry services that returning citizens count on. State and city leaders owe it to the people who did this work to hear them out and take their insight into serious consideration.”