

Assembly approves bills aimed at addressing high staff vacancy rates at prisons

Posted on Wednesday, Jan 26, 2022

Dem Rep. Evan Goyke slammed his colleagues for supporting a bill that would allow guards at the state's juvenile prisons to use pepper spray even though they've been accused in the past of misusing the chemical irritant.

Assembly Republicans pushed forward with a series of bills aimed at increasing prison recruitment and retention efforts as DOC struggles with vacancy rates higher than 40 percent in some maximum security prisons. One of those bills aims to allow prison guards to carry and use pepper spray, but Goyke, of Milwaukee, slammed his Republican colleagues for not continuing their work to close the troubled youth prison.

Republicans approved six bills on party-line 58-34 votes, while Dem Rep. Steve Doyle, of Onalaska, joined Republicans on a bill that would direct Gov. Tony Evers to spend American Rescue Plan Act funds on prison guard raises.

The chamber also approved via voice vote a bill that would require DOC to record and refer to law enforcement with jurisdiction all records of battery against prison guards or teachers by a prisoner.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

Goyke said youth prison guards still would not be able to use pepper spray against minors even if Gov. Evers signed the bill because former Gov. Scott Walker signed a legal agreement that included a ban on pepper spray use at the youth prisons.

But GOP Rep. Patrick Snyder, of Schofield, said he supports AB 826 because he fears for some of his constituents who work at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake and he

wants to give them the tools they need to defend themselves.

“They need to be able to save their lives,” he said.

Goyke took the time to blast his GOP colleagues for burying an older bill that would spend over \$40 million dollars on a replacement facility for Lincoln Hills in Milwaukee despite previous Republican efforts to move the bill forward.

“There’s no disagreement in this body about what to do with juvenile corrections,” he said. “We got two thirds of the way there. We need to finish the work we started a few years ago.”

He said AB 524 is the third and final prong in the plan to close the youth prison.