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# JOEL KITCHENS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 1<sup>ST</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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## **Rep. Kitchens disappointed with governor's refusal to fund the replacement of Green Bay prison**

MADISON, Wis. – Rep. Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay) is voicing his disappointment today following Gov. Tony Evers' announcement that he will not be including funding in his state budget to replace the outdated and deficient Green Bay Correctional Institution.

But Kitchens remains hopeful the governor will change his mind once he gets a chance to review a state-commissioned prison facilities study that will be released in the near future.

Through an open records request, lawmakers have been able to obtain a draft of the study, which provides proof the 121-year old maximum security facility in Allouez has become far too expensive to maintain. A different study completed about a decade ago under former Gov. Scott Walker paints a similar picture.

"It's no secret the Green Bay Correctional Institution has become too pricey and too unsafe to operate," Kitchens said. "Because the failing structure is falling apart and constantly requires repairs and renovations, we are deeply concerned about issues related to overcrowding and potential costs. The facility poses a safety risk to both inmates and staff. It has been called the most dangerous place in Wisconsin. We have a moral obligation to ensure that humane conditions are maintained at the correctional institution."

Officials have estimated that it would cost \$309 million to build a new prison for 1,300 inmates in rural Northeast Wisconsin. Other estimates show the state would have to put about \$220 million into the existing facility just to reach current standards, but Kitchens says that still won't allow the GBCI to meet its needs. The current facility was built to house 749 inmates and is operating at 33 percent above capacity.

"A new structure will require less staff and less energy," Kitchens said. "The payback on a new facility will be about six years. This should be a very easy decision."

While Wisconsin's high incarceration rates are a concern Kitchens shares with Gov. Evers, the representative believes it will only be solved through common-sense criminal justice reforms.

"A new structure will include educational facilities to provide rehabilitation opportunities and address the high rates of recidivism that we see in our inmates," Kitchens said. "This is a complex issue that will require an equally complex solution. This is not a problem that happened overnight and it's definitely not a problem that is going to be solved overnight."

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