



WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE

Joint Audit Committee

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Audit Reviews Adult Corrections Expenditures

MADISON – Today, the nonpartisan Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) released its audit of adult corrections expenditures (report 19-4). The Department of Corrections (DOC) operates 36 adult institutions. Wisconsin’s adult inmate population increased from 2009 to 2018, and grew from 21,941 in 2011 to 23,675 in 2018, or by 7.9 percent. Operating expenditures for adult corrections increased from an estimated \$909.3 million in fiscal year (FY) 2013-14 to \$933.9 million in FY 2017-18, or by 2.7 percent. LAB found average daily operating expenditures per inmate varied substantially among adult institutions and indicated that over 60 percent of this variation was explained by the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) security personnel per inmate at each adult institution.

In FY 2017-18, LAB found 62.8 percent of Wisconsin’s total adult correctional expenditures were for personnel. In FY 2017-18, LAB found DOC was authorized 7,649.9 FTE for adult corrections and spent \$586.8 million in personnel expenditures to support the operation of adult institutions. Of the \$397.5 million spent on wages and contract staff expenditures in FY 2017-18, \$52.9 million, or 13.3 percent, was for overtime hours. The total number of paid overtime hours increased from 1.2 million in FY 2013-14 to 1.9 million in FY 2017-18, or by 50.7 percent. Turnover rates for correctional officers increased from 17.8 percent in FY 2013-14 to 26.1 percent in FY 2017-18 and the vacancy rate for all security positions increased from 6.7 percent to 14.0 percent during this period.

“The Audit identifies several initiatives DOC has attempted to try to retain staff through wage add-ons, signing bonuses, job fairs, and on-site training programs, though better data needs to be collected to determine the effectiveness of these different programs. However, the goal is still to reduce staffing vacancies, turnover, and instances of excessive overtime. Doing this would not only result in cost savings, but ultimately a safer work environment,” said Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay).

Although the largest areas of expenditure growth in adult corrections were for pharmaceuticals and medical supplies and for contracted medical services, LAB found that health care reports completed by correctional institutions were incomplete and inaccurate. LAB recommends that DOC use its new electronic medical records system to improve its collection and analysis of inmate health services data and potentially reduce future expenditures.

“With personnel being the largest expenditure category and appropriate staffing levels being essential to the safety of DOC operations, there is no one silver bullet for reducing corrections costs,” said Rep. Samantha Kerkman (R-Salem Lakes). “However, the audit does identify other areas of opportunity for cost savings. Better tracking and analysis of health care needs and costs across institutions could be expected to suggest efficiencies or economies of scale that would result in cost reductions.”

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While LAB notes that DOC has taken steps to reduce health care costs, such as purchasing pharmaceuticals, medical supplies, and dental supplies through a multi-state compact to negotiate lower prices, LAB also recommends increasing the use of telemedicine appointments, consolidating inmate trips to external medical appointments, and enhancing efforts by DOC to assess its treatment and educational programming.

Copies of LAB's report (report 19-4) may be obtained from its website at www.legis.wisconsin.gov/lab or by calling (608) 266-2818. Report concerns related to state government activities to LAB by calling the toll-free hotline at 1-877-FRAUD-17.

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