

**City of Racine, Wisconsin  
Office of the Common Council**



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January 4, 2021

Honorable County Executive Jonathan Delagrave  
Members of the Racine County Board of Supervisors  
730 Wisconsin Ave  
Racine, Wisconsin 53403

County Executive Delagrave,

Thank you for presenting to the Racine Common Council at our December 15th meeting. We appreciate you sharing details of the County's proposed plan to construct a facility at 1717 Taylor Avenue, in the City of Racine, that will co-locate a Secure Residential Care Center for Children and Youth (SRCCCY) and Detention Center for youth, which you have recently renamed as a Youth Development and Care Center. Your passion for the project was evident and appreciated.

We also appreciate that the County's proposal envisions a facility that would include long overdue and welcome improvements in both conditions and services from those at the current youth detention facility, located on the third floor of the County's existing building at 1717 Taylor Avenue. We recognize that you and your team are striving to create a facility that is more informed by best practices, including trauma-informed care, and that will no doubt provide more holistic services for youth.

However, we still have significant concerns about this proposal, which would locate a 70,000 square foot youth detention facility in the heart of the City of Racine. This facility would replace an existing facility but create a third, free-standing, incarcerating facility within the City limits. And this new facility would detain youth not only from Racine County, but according to your grant application to the state, also from all of our Southeastern Wisconsin neighboring counties, including Kenosha, Walworth, Washington, Ozaukee, Waukesha, Rock, and Jefferson. While we heard and appreciate your desire to get this facility to "zero detentions" of Racine County youth, there are no guarantees that you can accomplish that goal and instead, it is far more probable that this new facility will ultimately house both Racine County youth and dozens of youth in crisis from all of our surrounding counties.

The presentation that was given to Council also left questions about the number of City of Racine youth being detained as well as what equity looks like for the youth detained in the facility. We believe it was stated that 90 percent of the incarcerated youth were from the City of Racine, but we have also heard that 15 of 38

currently incarcerated youth are City residents. You made the argument that it is more equitable to build this facility in the City because that is where the majority of youth detained there are from, yet the lack of clarity about those current numbers gives us pause. Additionally, given that the stated goal is to get to zero detentions of County residents, and given the City of Racine's distance from the surrounding counties that would also be sending youth to the facility, it seems like this new facility will create new challenges to achieving equity, instead of moving us closer to our shared goals around equity.

The construction of this facility in a key corridor, in the middle of a residential neighborhood, and within blocks of one of our Community Schools at Knapp Elementary, would also represent a significant step back from the progress we have been working to achieve to stabilize and enhance this diverse City neighborhood.

Just as importantly, we are troubled by the message that placing this new facility in the City of Racine would send to our residents. The City is focused on tackling systemic racial inequities and disparities that have plagued our community for too long. Our efforts to ensure opportunity and advancement for our African American and Latinx residents are not furthered by the construction of a new detention facility within the City limits that we fear - and that data unfortunately indicates - will overwhelmingly detain African American and Latinx youth.

It also seems clear from your presentation that the neighborhood surrounding the proposed facility did not receive direct outreach from the County and was not directly involved in conversations surrounding this proposed facility. We can appreciate the leadership group you put together to review the project, but feel strongly that more direct outreach to the immediate neighbors to gather their input and hear and address their concerns is, at a minimum, needed before such a project could possibly proceed.

We also find it troubling that there were no architectural plans or renderings shared with the Council. Designs are a useful tool to help bring concepts to life and lack of design at this stage of the process is concerning. We can't imagine this Council approving plans for a new fire station or multifamily housing development without understanding the design, foot print, and architecture so that we can visualize the impact to the surrounding neighborhood.

However, our concerns about this facility are not simply about design elements and how the building appears from the street: no matter how nice this facility looks, it will still be a jail for youth, and we do not want more of our community's youth and their families to see and internalize a jail for children as "normal" in their neighborhoods or as something that their City leadership supports or endorses.

Finally, at your presentation to Council you expressed a desire to turn this facility eventually into some other sort of holistic service center. However, that vision was not clearly articulated and the enabling language from the State reads, "...If for any reason, the facility that is constructed with funds from the grant is not used for the purposes identified in the grant under 2017 Wisconsin Act...the state shall retain an ownership interest in

the facility equal to the amount of the state's grant." [2017 Wis Act 185, 13.48 (27m)(c)] Given this enabling legislation's language, it seems clear that this facility cannot ever be anything other than a permanent juvenile detention facility.

**While we fully recognize the need to make significant improvements to the current facility at Taylor Avenue, at this time we are opposed to the construction of this new youth detention facility in the City of Racine.** We are prepared to direct City leadership and staff to pursue all possible options to prevent this facility from being constructed at the proposed Taylor Avenue location.

During your presentation to Council you mentioned other potential sites that were explored, and in your grant application to the State of Wisconsin you clearly planned on selecting a different site - one not in the City of Racine - to locate this facility. We offer ourselves as willing partners to work with you to evaluate and select another location, outside of the City of Racine, within Racine County.

Thank you,

John Tate II  
Council President  
District #3

Jeff Coe  
Alder  
District #1

Mollie Jones  
Alder  
District #2

Edwin Santiago  
Alder  
District #4

Jennifer Levie  
Alder  
District #5

Maurice Horton  
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City of Racine