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Wednesday, January 17, 2018

Department of Corrections Secretary Jon Litscher,

We are writing you on behalf of the staff of the Department of Corrections across the State of Wisconsin.

Over the last few months an endless series of headlines have blanketed newspapers across the state detailing the systematic dysfunction within your department. While most of these headlines have focused on the juvenile prison at Lincoln Hills, our members, who are on the frontlines of correctional institutions, know that Lincoln Hills is only the tip of the iceberg.

It has been nearly two years since you have taken over the Department of Corrections. When you became Secretary, Lincoln Hills dominated headlines, safety issues were rampant, and vacancies were high and all these issues continue to be present.

Across the state poor safety conditions, inadequate training, and chronic staffing shortages are still occurring and have created an environment that is exceptionally dangerous for staff and inmates alike.

When you became Secretary you said "These are challenging times for DOC ... but my faith rests in... the thousands of employees we work with on a daily basis." While your employees appreciate your faith, they need more than that. They need improvements to workplace safety, they need more co-workers so they can work fewer hours and they need a leader who will fight to give workers a voice to help improve their workplace.

Secretary Litscher, you can be that leader. The proposed closure of Lincoln Hills can give that facility a fresh start, but **you can expand that fresh start to the whole department.**

By giving your employees a voice, you can begin to rebuild our correctional system. Cooperation and communication through positive meetings are things that you once championed in the Department. Employee Communication and Collaboration meetings are merely window dressings with hand-selected appointments. Vocal employees today feel at more risk of repercussions than ever before for speaking out. Those willing to subject themselves to that level of scrutiny to voice their opinions demonstrate a passion for the Department that should be encouraged. Once upon a time you would have searched for that type of employee to speak on worker issues.

For the last 7 years, your department has been unable to improve our correctional system because, to create lasting change, workers must be a part of the solution.

To bring employees into the conversation, we request that you immediately institute a monthly meeting at each facility with employee delegations selected by the front-line employees to begin addressing issues within the correctional system. We believe this is the most direct, and immediate, approach to start fixing the problems that are plaguing the department.

Your employees need help. Together, you and your staff can take the first step to get our correctional system back on track.

Sincerely,

Executive Director Rick Badger