

Wisconsin policymakers should be advancing policies to ensure that all people are treated with dignity and respect. However, Wisconsin policymakers have monumentally failed to achieve this goal over the last year at Waupun Correctional Institution (WCI) and Green Bay Correctional Institution (GBCI). March 27th is the one-year mark of the horrific lockdown in WCI. GBCI has been on lockdown for nearly one year now. Governor Evers, the Department of Corrections, and the state legislature have failed to end the ongoing humanitarian crisis in these prisons.

Long-term lockdowns are torture. During lockdowns people in prison are kept in their cells for 23 to 24 hours a day. Lockdowns result in severely reduced opportunities for visits from loved ones, recreation, educational programming, and showers. During lockdowns, people in prison normally have to eat all their meals in their cells. Last summer, people endured heat and humidity in tiny rooms without air conditioning, and often with one or less shower per week. In addition, people at WCI and GBCI have frequently been denied opportunities to receive adequate mental health care and medical care.

WCI and GBCI are both irredeemable torture chambers where no human being should be forced to live. The lockdowns have had a devastating impact on incarcerated people and their loved ones. Several people have died in WCI during the last year. Many people have reported becoming suicidal due to the atrocious conditions of confinement.

The State of Wisconsin seems to have had two main ways of responding to the lockdowns. First, they changed the name, as if calling it "modified movement" makes it any less horrific. Second, the Department of Corrections (DOC) made a huge effort to hire more corrections officers. While the large pay increase resulted in many new corrections officers around the state, the DOC still cannot fill all the positions in Waupun and Green Bay. Simply put, those two institutions are such nightmares that people do not want to work there, even at higher pay rates.

Wisconsin's problem is NOT a lack of corrections officers. Wisconsin's problem is that policymakers continue to incarcerate far too many people, and they continue to utilize outdated, unsafe and inhumane facilities like WCI and GBCI.

As Governor Evers looks for a new Corrections Secretary, he needs to make clear that the first priority must be to close GBCI and WCI. The Administration has the authority to do this. About 5,000 people in Wisconsin prisons are there because of a crimeless revocation -- they broke a rule of supervision or parole, but did not commit a new crime. The Department of Corrections has complete discretion over whether or not such people are sent to prison. Other states have drastically reduced their prison populations

just by cutting back on crimeless revocations -- even Wisconsin reduced its prison numbers significantly during COVID in this way. There are fewer than 2,000 people imprisoned in GBCI and WCI combined. Just a 40% reduction in crimeless revocations would enable Wisconsin to completely depopulate both of these prisons.

The people of Wisconsin need to let Governor Evers know that the current state of Corrections in Wisconsin is unacceptable. We need a Governor who will end the lockdowns and use common sense means of reducing the prison population so we can close GBCI and WCI.

Closing both of these prisons would save taxpayers \$100 million per year. These resources could instead be utilized to enhance programming in remaining prisons that would improve the quality of life there and prevent future lockdowns. Resources saved could also be redirected back to the communities that have been most harmed by mass incarceration. Making investments to improve living conditions both in Wisconsin prisons and in the most impacted neighborhoods would contribute to building the type of healthier and stronger neighborhoods that we all strive to create.