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League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Statement on Corrections Matters in the State Budget

In recent months the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin has been pleased by the bipartisan support expressed for a number of corrections reform initiatives that we support based on our [Administration of Justice positions](#). However, in analyzing the Governor's proposed biennial budget, we have serious concerns about some detention facilities and we find varying levels of support for programs aimed at changing offender behavior and enhancing opportunities for successful re-entry of ex-offenders into society.

Since the 2017 budget cycle the League has raised grave concerns about the well-being of youth held in the Lincoln Hills/Copper Lake facilities. We were very pleased with the bipartisan move to close those facilities. Now efforts are underway to establish local secure residential care facilities in various counties, which will enhance rehabilitation opportunities because of locations near families and their communities. While the process appears to be taking more time than anticipated, the League believes it is necessary to maintain some specific closure date for Lincoln Hills.

In this 2019 budget, our Milwaukee County League has testified about the proposed funding to maintain the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility. There have been a number of unfortunate deaths related to the existing conditions in that building, putting the welfare of people in jeopardy. LWV Milwaukee County has joined with many groups involved in criminal justice advocacy, as well as a past Secretary of the Department of Corrections, in calling for closure of this facility.

This detention facility is used primarily to incarcerate people who are on community supervision and have not committed a new crime. The state of Wisconsin detains people on community supervision at twice the rate of the national average. In the place of the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility, we support alternatives to revocation which would utilize community sites, having programs that connect ex-offenders to productive accountability and actual rehabilitation opportunities.

We urge lawmakers to provide much more funding for the Treatment Alternatives and Diversion (TAD) program, a popular and successful initiative to provide alternatives to incarceration for offenders. TAD was recently mentioned by Assembly Republicans as one of their priorities, and it has long been supported by the Democrats. Yet the Governor's proposed budget for this program falls far short of the \$15 million per year increase he said he would support.

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The Opening Avenues to Reentry Success (OARS) program is targeted to inmates with a serious and persistent mental illness. It is jointly run by the Department of Corrections and the Department of Health Services, and it helps connect inmates to housing, health care, educational opportunities and transportation upon release. The Governor's budget proposes to expand the OARS program, which currently operates in 44 counties, to the entire state. We support expansion of this program, which leads to more successful reintegration of offenders into society.

The Non-Violent Offender Treatment Diversion Pilot Program is a similar program, except that the funds are provided to police departments. We support the Governor's proposal to continue this program and expand it to more counties.

The League believes that policy changes should be passed in separate legislation with a separate hearings, rather than being wrapped into the biennial budget. Governor Evers' budget proposes to return 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system, which would provide age-appropriate treatment and reduce criminalization. The League has long advocated for this reform, as Wisconsin is one of only six states that require 17-year-olds be judged and sentenced in an adult court, rather than in juvenile court. However, we think this matter should be addressed and reformed properly with separate legislation. We hope to see legislative action on this soon.

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The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin is a nonpartisan political organization that advocates for informed and active participation in government. There are 20 local Leagues throughout Wisconsin. More information at lwvwi.org.