



WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR
DAVE HANSEN
SENATOR – 30TH DISTRICT

State Capitol P.O. Box 7882 Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7882 Phone: (608) 266-5670

July 26, 2016

Jon Litscher, Secretary
Department of Corrections
3099 East Washington Avenue
P.O. Box 7925
Madison, WI 53707-7925

--HAND DELIVERED--

Dear Secretary Litscher,

As someone who counts a significant number of corrections officers, workers and their families among my constituents, safety within our correctional institutions is a priority for me. From conversations you and I have had I believe we share that goal.

However, recent events at the Green Bay Correctional Institution (GBCI) have me more concerned than ever that assaults on corrections officers and staff are not isolated incidents, but becoming more prevalent making our institutions more dangerous for those who work in them.

As you know, on Monday, July 18th, an officer was assaulted by an inmate with boiling water that resulted in 2nd and 3rd degree burns over 40% of his body. Also, of concern is the response to his assault and resulting injuries.

It is my understanding that the officer at the scene tending to the injured officer requested an ambulance be sent to the north gate, closest to the kitchen, but that his request may have been overridden by a supervisor who was not on the scene, instead directing the ambulance to a gate further from the kitchen delaying the arrival of EMTs and the officer's transport to the Milwaukee Burn Center.

This assault occurred only weeks after three corrections employees were stabbed by an inmate who was later found dead in his cell and it is the third major assault in less than a year—including an incident last summer involving a violent attack of two corrections employees that was so severe that neither has been able to return to work.

These assaults raise significant concerns about the safety of GBCI personnel amid the backdrop of funding cuts and changes made to the Department of Corrections over the past several years.

Among those concerns is the lack of working radios during Monday's assault that resulted in a delay in locking down the GBCI. It is my understanding that corrections officers may not hear radio calls up to 50% of the time because the phones and bases do not match, that phones need to continually be re-charged and that the control center master radio does not stop other radio traffic in an emergency. As a result I'm told, while the command center is attempting to call all officers

and staff during an emergency, others can still use their radio to communicate which blocks or disrupts transmissions so not everyone in the facility is aware of an emergency or lockdown as it is happening.

Other concerns involve the apparent lack of blind spot mirrors that could help prevent inmates from waging surprise attacks on officers and staff, and reports that protocol was not followed in response to the most recent assault which led to the delay in getting medical treatment to the injured officer.

I know you agree that safety should be of paramount concern in our correctional institutions. That is the reason for writing to you today to make the following requests:

- That a thorough and independent review be done of the GBCI to identify and correct the changes in policy and the environment within the institution that may have contributed to what appears to be a dangerous trend of more brazen assaults against officers and staff.
- That the GBCI and its employees all receive working radios and compatible bases and new batteries. Working radios for each and every officer every minute they are at work is essential. If funding is a problem I am happy to work with you to request a 13.10 meeting of the Joint Finance Committee to release the necessary funding.
- That officers and staff be consulted with respect to the installation and or re-installation of blind spot mirrors to provide additional situational awareness and protection for the officers and staff.

I was encouraged to hear you want to improve communication between staff and management within the department. Those on the front lines who risk their lives every day to keep us safe have a greater understanding of what is needed to keep them safe in the performance of their duties. For this reason, I urge you to create a system in which representatives, chosen by corrections officers and staff, have seats at the table and are active participants when decisions are being made regarding their safety and the safety of DOC institutions.

From conversations we've had I believe you share my concern for the safety of every officer and employee at GBCI and in your department. For these reasons I respectfully make these requests and hope to work with you to make sure the concerns raised in response to the recent assaults at GBCI are addressed.

Thank you for your attention to my concerns.

Sincerely,



Dave Hansen
State Senator

DH:jmw