

Dear Chairs Latz, Becker-Finn, and Moller; Representatives Feist, Frazier, and Curran, and Senators Oumou-Verbeten, Pappas, Seeberger, and Westlin --

I'm so grateful for the hard and important work you have done this session, and grateful that I trust y'all to continue it strongly. I am learning every day watching this process and I thank you for letting us learn together.

My main purpose here is to point out one important opportunity around a tremendous threat to the overall direction of the work -- the projected 1200 prison population increase, a nearly 15% increase.

As many of you know better than me, Minnesota has repeatedly hit the edge of its carceral capacity, and is in the midst of a long term staffing crisis. It's no wonder: our prison population has ballooned over 500% since we started instituting mass incarceration policies, while we continue to engineer the failure, not the success of incarcerated people in 1000s of ways. Let me tell you about a special policy the Commissioner has made for me, only me, sometime!

However, as the last election showed, people no longer naively accept that "tough on crime" creates safety, which is not to say we are satisfied with the level of violence, homelessness, and poverty in our communities. We can only defeat false narratives if we show and prove otherwise, making real safety a bipartisan issue.

Visionary legislation is a crucial lever for doing so, and Commissioner Paul Schnell has been a key person in what is to me the greatest current lever in our prisons -- the MRRA. And he has leveraged an astounding \$200 million dollar a year annual increase from you, in the name of making it work.

Yet what he appears *not* to be doing is making that show up in our prisons. Last Friday he put up a memo stating the law will not be retroactive until Jan 1, 2025 despite the law going into effect Aug 1, 2023, refusing to even consider the hard work of over 1300 incarcerated people. He has also been silent on supervision retroactivity, which has a clear legal standard of 1 month off for every 2 months in compliance, something that could positively impact 6700+ Minnesotans. We know oversupervision creates more harm than it solves.

If we do not do the spiritual labor of implementing visionary laws to shift systems to another course, reform will be lost. If the DOC's visionary leader does not use this gigantic increase in budget to safely reduce our prison population we will end up in a worse situation than where we started after the next swing of the pendulum. Tough on crime will be true because reform was fake. We need Commissioner Schnell, and we need all of you to make sure he, and all the DOC staff, do that work.

As we move from a budget to an election year, winners will be things people celebrate at the dining room table, like their loved ones having earned their way home. The corrections side of the Omnibus package can be one such real thing to celebrate -- if you ensure there are teeth to its happening.

One simple yet authentically powerful thing I ask you to do to ensure that this prison population issue is addressed, is this. *Take the \$10 million of unnecessary funds for an increased prison population and reallocate them to something that will further safely reduce that prison population: expanding work release. Use your budget to make sure your reforms show up in real life, on the ground.*

Not only does this address the staffing, homelessness, and in-prison and community violence issues, it sends a clear signal that safety means putting in work to earn safety. That the work of incarcerated people, DOC staff, leadership, and community is seen and valued, and is important. That we need all of us to be the change to have a state that is safe. That reforms will reduce the prison population and not just use rehabilitative words.

It says Minnesota will not simply restart the prison overcrowding crisis again, we will go another way. That is what a Minnesota miracle looks like.

The incarcerated people most likely to be cut out of the current MRRA non-implementation, the ones most likely to earn work release if it is expanded, are those most likely to be the ones ahead of the curve in creating safety in their communities. The community is here to welcome people home if the DOC takes down the barriers to doing so. We need our survivors of incarceration to help shake off this divide and conquer and create a safety system that works for everyone -- because it works for everyone. To create safety we need our people home for good.

Next year, our organization and coalition will be much more prepared to show up, in every Republican and Democratic district, as the people for whom this matters so much. People in prison also very much deserve your time, and I hope all of us will dream together this summer, and make dreams for the next 3 years.

For now though, I ask you, on behalf of those who cannot, to make one very important move -- a step for safety, for people putting in spiritual work. A step for good not wasteful government, and a clarion call to all who suffer behind walls, as legal 21st century slaves. *Move the budget line from increasing the prison population to getting them home for good on work release.*

Thank you.

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