

April 17, 2025

Representative Zack Stephenson
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
5th Floor Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Representative Paul Torkelson
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
2nd Floor Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Stephenson, Chair Torkelson, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to, first, express my gratitude for the work of Chair Moller and Chair Novotny and the House Public Safety Committee during this legislative session, particularly in light of the significant fiscal constraints facing our state. I recognize that the challenges before the committee are substantial. While a balanced and thoughtful budget is essential to addressing the looming statewide deficit, it is equally essential to sustain and build upon the progress that has been made within Minnesota's correctional system.

First, I would like to thank the committee for amending a majority of the Department of Corrections' budget-neutral policy provisions into House File 2432. These changes will reduce inefficiencies, enhance service delivery, and increase transparency in our operations.

However, I would like to express my deep concern regarding the Department of Corrections' operating adjustment, which falls far short of the Governor's recommendation of \$110.1 million for FY26-27. The level of funding proposed in House File 2432 does not provide the funding necessary to meet the agency's needs and will result in significant operational impacts. Again, I fully understand the financial constraints the state faces and the balancing act required in addressing numerous public safety priorities, but I worry that the funding level proposed will have severe, long-term consequences for the mission of the DOC, our staff, and the safety of our institutions.

At this funding level, there will be direct impact to the DOC's ability to maintain critical staffing levels, sustain rehabilitative programming, and ensure the overall safety of our facilities. Given that a majority of the DOC's expenditures are staff-related, layoffs will be the only method for a balanced agency budget.

The necessary staffing cuts based upon the resources provided will limit program access and result in a dramatic increase in idle time for those in the population. Idle or unstructured time in prisons correlates with increases in misconduct, heightened levels of violence, and other institutional safety concerns. Research has shown that idle time and reduced access to rehabilitative programming

increases the risk of recidivism. Safe, properly staffed and program rich prison environments has been the shared goals for corrections in Minnesota and achievement of these goals are in jeopardy without adequate funding.

Additionally, critically, reducing programming access will mean that critical rehabilitative services will either be discontinued or significantly scaled back, preventing incarcerated individuals from receiving the support they need to successfully rehabilitate before reentering society. This, in turn, increases risk to public safety, as individuals who are not properly prepared for reentry are more likely to reoffend. These dynamics will ultimately impact an already strained criminal justice system as reoffending as impacts policing, criminal prosecution, and our court system. In the end, failing to offer meaningful correctional intervention increases the risk of victimization.

It is important to stress that the vast majority of the DOC's budget—97%—is funded through the state's general fund, which means we have no alternative sources of revenue to make up for these shortfalls. The DOC's reliance on the general fund funding leaves the agency particularly vulnerable when funding does not align with the needs of the system, and the resulting consequences are felt acutely across our operations.

I do want to recognize and thank the House Public Safety Committee, and especially Chair Moller and Chair Novotny, for their ongoing support of the DOC over the years. We deeply appreciate the collaborative approach they have demonstrated to ensure our efforts to transform lives for a safer Minnesota. It is with this history of partnership in mind that I hope this funding decision is reconsidered as budget discussions and decisions move forward. I understand the difficult position the committee faces, but I feel compelled to highlight how underfunding of the DOC's operating adjustment will have significant negative impacts on the agency's ability to fulfill its duties and responsibilities for our state.

Thank you for your time, attention, and continued dedication to the public safety of Minnesotans.

Sincerely,



Paul Schnell, Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Corrections