



Wisconsin Department of Corrections

Governor Tony Evers | Secretary Kevin A. Carr

Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety
Public hearing on Governor Evers nomination of Kevin A. Carr as Secretary of the Department of
Corrections
February 20, 2019

Secretary-designee Kevin A. Carr testimony

Good morning Chairman Wanggaard and members of the committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify today. It is an honor to appear before you, and I am truly humbled Governor Evers nominated me to be Secretary of the Department of Corrections.

I will start my remarks by telling you a little about me personally and professionally. I met my wife Judy in 1977 and we have been together ever since. We have two children, Andrew and Marisa, who are grown and on their own. We live in Milwaukee County where we are active members of Gesu Parish on the Marquette University campus. My non-professional interests include volunteering at St Ben's meal program, reading, gardening, fishing and watching sporting events of almost any kind in person or on TV.

I have been a public servant since 1977 working with troubled youth at the Milwaukee County Children's Home and the Child Adolescent Treatment Center. I started my law enforcement career in 1980 when I joined the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office. During the next 30 years I was honored to serve in almost every division and serve at nearly every rank in the agency. The highlights of my Sheriff's Office career were the seven years I was assigned to undercover narcotics investigations, the four years working as a Supervisor in the Detention Bureau, the four years working in Internal Affairs and finishing the last eight years of my career there as the second in command of the agency, responsible for the day-to-day operation of the largest Sheriff's Office in our state.

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In 2010, I was honored to be appointed to the position of U.S. Marshal for the Eastern District of Wisconsin by President Barack Obama. I served as the U.S. Marshal until January of this year when Governor Evers presented me with the opportunity of a lifetime to serve the people of Wisconsin as the Secretary of Corrections. I am also one of the founding members of Milwaukee County's Community Justice Council, which regularly brings together every level of the criminal justice system including judges, prosecutors, and treatment providers. In other words: I have been proudly serving the citizens of Wisconsin for a long, long time.

In my opinion, law enforcement is a non-partisan activity. I have never enforced the law based on a person's political affiliation or ideology. For me, it's not about politics, it's about policy and doing the right thing. I intend to adhere to these principles as the Secretary of Corrections.

It has been a privilege meeting with legislators, listening to citizens and learning new things about the agency every day. As you are already aware, the Department of Corrections is the state's largest agency. We have approximately 10,000 employees that work at 37 facilities, 131 Community Supervision offices around the state and here in Madison. We manage approximately 24,000 persons sentenced to confinement and approximately 66,000 persons on probation or parole at any given time.

In the time that I have been in office, I have found the employees in this agency to be highly professional, hard-working public servants that take seriously the responsibility and trust placed in them by the citizens of Wisconsin. I am proud to work alongside them. I hope to provide these fine women and men with the leadership, tools, training and support they need to carry out their important work for the people of Wisconsin. I have already met with hundreds of employees and will continue to hear their voices, support their good work, tell their stories, and work to increase their personal pride in this department.

My bedrock message to employees, advocates, legislators and those we serve is that the Department of Corrections' mission, first and foremost, is to maintain and improve public safety. To

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achieve excellence in this work, which includes supporting victims, we treat every person with dignity and respect, as well as provide those under our care and supervision with the treatment, training, tools and support to change their lives for the better. The department operates under the core value of “Every person, every family, every community matters.” This core value is a daily reminder of who we are and what we stand for: consideration for others, fairness in all dealings and equal opportunity. And, always, *always* doing the right thing.

As it relates to criminal justice reform, Governor Evers has challenged all of us, regardless of where we sit politically, to work together to find common sense solutions that will result in the kinds of outcomes that will lead to increased public safety, reduced expenditures, and lower recidivism; results we can all be proud of. That’s why it is so important that we connect the dots on these important issues and bring everyone to the table to solve problems. In my discussions with many of you, I know these are common goals that have bipartisan support.

What does this specifically mean for the Department of Corrections? It means the continued use and expansion of evidence-based practices to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our work. It means ensuring that in keeping with the theme “A Wisconsin for All”, our actions, processes, policies and interactions reflect the value we place on strengthening communities and families. It means recognizing the inherent God given value in every human being regardless of their offense. It means believing in the capacity for an individual to change and respecting their right to be treated with human dignity. It also means identifying the strategies that have proven effective in other states to improve our outcomes. There are several states around the country that have implemented smart criminal justice reforms that saved taxpayer money, lowered prisoner populations and improved outcomes without increasing risk to citizens. The federal government recently passed the First Step Act with bipartisan support. This reform includes giving judges more discretion in sentencing offenders for nonviolent crimes and strengthening reentry programs to reduce recidivism and help formerly incarcerated people to have productive, crime-free futures. I believe we can do the same or better here in Wisconsin.

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The Department of Corrections is facing several challenges. Staff shortages, the court ordered consent decree regarding Lincoln Hills, the related building of the new juvenile facilities on the state and county levels, and the age of buildings and over-crowding at our facilities, among others.

As it relates to our staffing issues, I believe the over 700 vacancies we have in security positions alone significantly impacts the quality of service we provide to those in our care and impacts employee morale. Our pay structure must be more competitive and our recruitment and retention efforts must be enhanced. Our employees have performed admirably while working multiple 16-hour shifts a week and missing time with their loved ones to help us accomplish our mission. We must show and communicate to them whenever we can, how much we value and appreciate their contributions to keeping Wisconsin citizens safe. I am proud of the career I have built in law enforcement and hope to convince Wisconsinites that a career at the Department of Corrections is a family-supporting, stable and proud profession.

Another priority for the Department, is to implement Act 185 alongside our colleagues at the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and Department of Health Services. As you are aware, Act 185 was signed by Governor Walker in 2017 and aimed to close Lincoln Hills as a juvenile facility. The Governor and I are committed to closing the facility as soon as possible but we must also be realistic about the amount of time it takes to design and build these specialty facilities. Should the facilities be completed sooner, I can't think of any justification to not close Lincoln Hills whenever there is an acceptable location for the youth to be placed. Further, I support the reforms as well as the research that supports placing our youth closer to their communities and families, increasing the likelihood for their successful, positive reentry. The work ahead of us on Act 185 is complex and will require all of us working together to ensure the needs of our youth are met. I am certain we will get this done.

Some may think that the road ahead for the agency is too difficult. Others may even go so far as to say these reforms and initiatives will go against what we have always done. My response is: No.

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While the road ahead may be rough, with perseverance we will get there. And, yes, we will do some things differently.

I believe that we have locked up too many people, for too long, at too high a cost to the taxpayers and with too little to show in the way of results. I believe there are better ways to engage persons in confinement or supervision that will lead to better outcomes. Various types of evidence-based programming from reentry, job training, AODA, mental health and the cadre of programs in the realm of restorative justice and trauma informed care will improve our outcomes. I also believe that we can achieve greater results by implementing strategies that worked elsewhere.

Of course, we will sometimes fall short of our expectations, nothing in life is guaranteed. But I will work every day to improve public safety for the citizens of Wisconsin and to improve the lives of those in our care. This opportunity to serve as the Secretary of Corrections is, for me, the opportunity of a lifetime. I would be honored to work with you and the incredible employees at the Department of Corrections to continue to serve the people of Wisconsin.

Thank you for time and consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.