



Wisconsin Department of Corrections

Governor Tony Evers | Secretary Jared Hoy

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Progress report on changes at Wisconsin's correctional institutions

DOC provides update on ongoing and new policy implementations, expanded programming, leadership changes, among other efforts

Madison, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Corrections today provided a progress report relating to ongoing efforts to resume and expand programming at correctional institutions, address staffing challenges, resume standard operations, and ensure safety of staff and people in our care. The department has previously provided progress reports on its efforts in January and April, in addition to other, periodic updates, as well.

“The past months of modified movement have allowed staff to examine our policies to enhance safety while offering persons in our care high-quality educational and therapeutic programming and services,” Department of Corrections (DOC) Secretary Jared Hoy said. “As we continue this work and look toward the future, DOC staff are continuing to make improvements at our correctional institutions, which balance safety for everyone with opportunities for the persons in our care.”

Progress report on implementing new policy changes

Over the past year, a number of programming changes and expansions and other policies have been updated, refined, and enacted, including at Waupun Correctional Institution (WCI) and Green Bay Correctional Institution (GBCI). Many of the procedures developed at WCI and GBCI are being used throughout adult correctional facilities in DOC.

Some of the changes include:

- Enhanced training and frequency of security rounds throughout all Division of Adult Institutions (DAI) facilities.
- At WCI, work is ongoing to install a “Guard 1” system. The system uses sensors installed at each cell front that a correctional officer making rounds must activate to document that the cell was checked. Green Bay Correctional and other facilities already use the system.
- New training for all DAI staff on medication distribution and enhanced documentation.

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Wisconsin Department of Corrections

Governor Tony Evers | Secretary Jared Hoy

- At WCI, an audit is completed after each medication distribution to ensure that all medication prescribed has been documented. Any discrepancies must be investigated by a supervisor and resolved before the next scheduled medication distribution.
- DAI staff have now been trained to perform security audits of each facility and all adult institutions must have a completed a security audit this year. The audits evaluate how well an institution's practices align with Wisconsin DOC policies. WCI's audit has recently begun and is due by the end of June.
- At Waupun, a supervisor now meets with restrictive housing unit staff at the beginning of each shift to review procedures, provide updates and resolve any concerns from persons in our care.

New limitations on restrictive housing use

In addition to the above changes, DOC has implemented new policies regarding restrictive housing at all adult institutions.

The new restrictive housing policy, which went into effect May 13, includes:

- Limiting time spent in restrictive housing to the minimum amount necessary to effect behavioral change
- New maximum time limits for placement in disciplinary separation with different limits designated for persons in our care with mental health needs
- Require an assistant administrator to approve any disciplinary separation sanctions of more than 120 days
- Consider mental health in all decisions about restrictive housing placement and programming availability
- Require Psychological Services Unit staff to assess persons in our care with a mental health diagnosis within 24 hours of placement in restrictive housing
- Redefine restrictive housing Step Programs that offer behavioral incentives including self-help and in-cell programming, staff encouragement and feedback, out-of-cell groups, programming as resources allow, and additional out-of-cell time for individuals with a mental health diagnosis
- Regular placement reviews for all persons in our care with more frequent reviews for those with a mental health diagnosis

Staff at WCI and GBCI have worked diligently to resume standard operations at both institutions as quickly as possible while also adding new programming and opportunities for persons in our care. Much of these efforts have been made possible through increased compensation, which has led to the department graduating its largest classes of correctional officers in the DOC's history.

WCI transitioned to single-cell occupancy

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Wisconsin Department of Corrections

Governor Tony Evers | Secretary Jared Hoy

DOC in February met a goal set by Governor Tony Evers last November to reduce the population at WCI and transition the facility to single-cell occupancy, enabling people in our care to reside in their own cells.

After a previous visit last November, Evers had directed DOC to reduce WCI's population to allow eligible persons in our care to be housed in their own cells no later than March 1, 2024. By late February, DOC had reduced the population at WCI from more than 900 to 739, and all eligible individuals were in their own cells. A few members of the population do remain in double cells, however, to address their individual needs.

DOC vacancy rates nearly halved since August 2023

DOC's staffing situation continues to improve. The Department of Corrections has seen record numbers of graduates from its training academy since Governor Evers and the state Legislature raised based pay for correctional officers last fall.

More than 630 officers have graduated the training academy so far this year. Overall, the vacancy rate for correctional officers and sergeants across DOC is about 19% as compared to 35% last August.

At WCI, the vacancy rate for correctional officers and sergeants is at nearly 51% -- which is the lowest level it's been since April 2023. At GBCI, the vacancy rate is nearly 31%, down from about 41% in February.

In the current academy class, which graduates in late June, 28 individuals have indicated they plan to work at WCI and 24 plan to work at GBCI. When the June academy class graduates it's estimated that the vacancy rate at WCI will decline to 44% and further decline to 34% when the August training academy graduates join the workforce.

"The positive changes made at WCI, GBCI and throughout the DOC would not have been possible without our staff," Hoy said. "Governor Evers' effort to raise the starting wage for correctional officers to \$33 an hour in his biennial budget is the key reason why DOC recruitment efforts have begun to pay off."

WCI and GBCI close to normal operation

For months now, persons in our care at WCI and GBCI have been leaving their cells according to regular schedules for things such as medical and mental health appointments, work assignments, religious services, education, law library visits, and more. WCI and GBCI have largely resumed normal operations after making safety, policy and programming enhancements. Both sites continue to offer video visitation. GBCI resumed in-person visits in November. GBCI has



Wisconsin Department of Corrections

Governor Tony Evers | Secretary Jared Hoy

recently added more recreation time and in-person visitation at WCI is expected to resume this summer – addressing the final administrative rule suspensions at each site.

Recreation time has also increased at GBCI. The week of May 20, GBCI began offering at least two 50-minute recreation periods per week with at least one additional recreation period per month. At WCI, persons in our care receive at least two 90-120 minute recreation periods per week and additional recreation time as staffing allows. Recreation periods are offered outdoors, weather permitting.

At this time, only a state administrative rule regarding the length of recreation time offered remains suspended at both institutions and an administrative rule requiring in-person visitation is suspended at WCI.

New programming promotes close contact with loved ones

Additionally, new investments in technology have also helped persons in our care develop and maintain closer ties to family and friends in the community. GBCI and WCI were two of the first institutions to receive new electronic tablets for all persons in our care.

Persons in our care at Waupun were issued new electronic tablets in March. The tablets, which are being rolled out to all DOC facilities, are provided at no cost to the persons in our care. In the first week of the new tablets at Waupun, the number of minutes persons in our care spent talking on the phone grew by nearly 67%.

The new tablets – which are provided free to each person in our care – offer a secure way for phone calls and messages to be sent to friends and family. The program was designed to help persons in our care maintain and strengthen communication with their families and friends.

The tablets also allow for instant law library access as well as offer educational resources.

In-person educational programming resumed

In-person classes resumed in April at WCI and earlier this year at GBCI. Currently, classes focus on preparing persons in our care for General Educational Development (GED) or High School Equivalency Degree (HSED) testing. Four levels of math and language arts classes are offered as well as courses in science, social studies and civics.

Throughout modified movement periods at WCI and GBCI, high school equivalency degree testing, lessons at the cell front, and virtual educational programming were offered at both WCI and GBCI. In addition, Higher Education in Prison students, who are pursuing associate degrees using Pell grants for distance learning with partner colleges, were able to continue their studies.



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Governor Tony Evers | Secretary Jared Hoy

Leadership changes across DOC institutions

Along with other leadership changes announced last week, Redgranite Correctional Institution (RGCI) Warden Michael Gierach is now the Warden of the Wisconsin Women's Correctional System after the retirement of former Warden Jennifer McDermott.

DAI Security Chief Robert Miller has been named the Warden of the Racine Correctional Institution/Sturtevant Transitional Facility (RCI/STF).

New Lisbon Correctional Institution (NLCI) Warden Dan Cromwell will be serving as Warden at Dodge Correctional Institution (DCI) starting June 30 after the retirement of current DCI Warden Jason Benzel.