

Wisconsin Department of Corrections

Governor Tony Evers | Secretary Jared Hoy

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DOC releases expert report identifying agency successes, strategies to improve evidence-based approach to corrections

***Year-long expert review validates key agency reforms and initiatives,
outlines roadmap to continue building upon improvements***

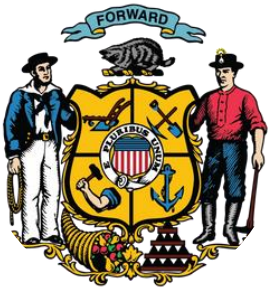
Madison, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) today released a report conducted by an expert team of correctional consultants that identifies DOC strengths and reaffirms key areas where the department has already improved while also offering a roadmap for future initiatives to build upon the department’s ongoing work to address staffing challenges, expand access to data-driven and evidence-based programming and services, address aging and outdated facilities, stabilize the population, and support the health and safety of staff and people in our care.

“Falcon experts recognized the work of countless dedicated DOC employees to modernize our health care and restrictive housing policies,” said DOC Secretary Jared Hoy. “As much as we’ve done, we can always do more, do better and the recommendations in the report provide a guide for our agency to update our practices and support our staff in making tangible differences in the lives of incarcerated individuals, their families and our communities.”

DOC sought outside assistance from Falcon, Inc. to conduct a comprehensive system-wide review of correctional, mental health, and physical health operations and practices, with a particular focus on restrictive housing and organizational culture. The analysis was designed to build upon the department’s ongoing efforts to expand evidence-based, data-driven practices designed to reduce recidivism, improve public safety, and keep staff and persons in the department’s care healthy and safe.

This independent assessment was conducted by an interdisciplinary team of experts who have expertise in the administration of state prison operations, correctional medical and behavioral

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health practices, the assessment of criminogenic risk, large-scale system studies, and restrictive housing reform. The review used a multi-method approach that included data requests and analyses, staff interviews, workshops with DAI staff and other key stakeholders, site visits, interviews with incarcerated individuals, and policy reviews. Virtual workshops were conducted with WIDOC subject matter experts from departments and facilities across the agency, and with other key stakeholders, including formerly incarcerated individuals and advocates, to incorporate all viewpoints and perspectives, as well as areas of expertise and experience. Additionally, the team of experts visited 15 DOC facilities to observe admission processes, housing units, health care delivery, programming spaces, and any other unique facility areas. Interviews with staff and incarcerated individuals across various housing units offered lived experience perspectives and provided insight into operational strengths and challenges.

The purpose of the department deciding to move forward with the independent evaluation was to serve as a tool to collectively understand, navigate, and prioritize recommendations for system improvements. There were three central objectives of the assessment:

- identify areas of strength that could be expanded upon throughout the department;
- identify areas requiring improvements; and
- provide actionable, evidence-based, and sustainable recommendations to achieve both short-term and long-term success.

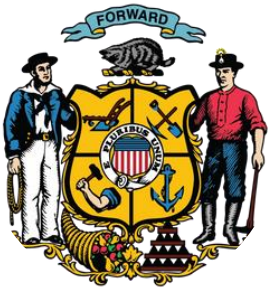
The report validates positive steps such as the development of an objective custody classification system in 2023, [restrictive housing reforms](#) unveiled in 2024, a restructuring of the Bureau of Health Services in 2024 as well as ongoing efforts to expand earned release programs and enhance correctional practices, Hoy said.

According to the report, the team of experts were “impressed with staff throughout the department, including correctional officers, program staff, social workers, wardens, facility administrators, facility leadership teams, medical and mental health staff and leaders, administrative support staff, and the Executive Leadership Team.” Over the course of the assessment and review, the experts “identified extremely competent and innovative staff at every level across the department.”

“While the report affirms that DOC is moving in the right direction, it also shows that there is more work to be done,” Hoy said. “I’m grateful that the dedicated professionals in this department are continuing to engage with the consultants and figure out innovative ways to make these recommendations a reality.”

System-Wide Validations

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The experts identified prominent areas of exemplary practices and strengths, identifying and validating areas the department should continue building upon across the DOC enterprise:

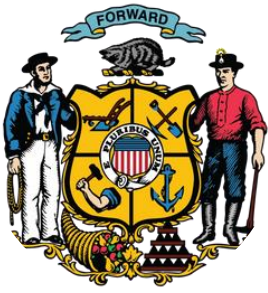
1. Knowledgeable and dedicated leadership is evident across headquarters, site-level, and unit-level teams, driving organizational progress.
2. Programming at medium-security and minimum-security facilities supports a range of rehabilitation efforts.
3. The establishment of the Bureau of Health Services highlights a commitment to centralized and efficient health care management.
4. Transitioning the mental health department reporting to the Bureau of Health Services reflects a strategic effort to streamline operations, strengthen coordination, and enhance oversight.
5. Partnerships with local colleges and universities extend the department's educational reach.
6. The medication assisted treatment initiative demonstrates a proactive approach to address addiction through evidence-based medical treatment and support.
7. Updates to the classification system, particularly with the Instruments for Custody Classification (IFCC), suggest a focus on maintaining safety and improving classification procedures.
8. Significant improvements in data collection and reporting through the publicly available dashboards indicate a commitment to accountability and to using data to identify and address systemic issues.

Key Findings

DOC is planning to contract with Falcon to create a framework to implement these recommendations. While many of the changes will impact the entire correctional system, the consultants and staff will be working together to reimagine existing space, create new processes and training at five pilot sites. Throughout this process, DOC committed to transparency and sharing the Falcon experts' report and recommendations upon completion and is doing so today. A copy of the report is available [here](#).

The report released by the department today outlines several key findings:

- **Wisconsin DOC is a “department in transition.”**
 - *“The Executive Leadership and Facility-Level Leadership Teams are comprised of competent professionals dedicated to the department’s mission and creating a vision toward ‘building a future.’ Like most correctional agencies today, WIDOC continues to ‘reset’ operational practices that were significantly disrupted by the*

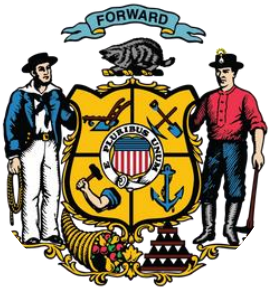


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COVID-19 pandemic. As of January 1, 2025, the majority of facility staff have returned to working on-site rather than working remotely.”

- **While staffing has improved, significant challenges remain.**
 - *WIDOC has experienced a great deal of staffing changes, with a significant number of the current staff hired during or after the COVID-19 pandemic. Newer staff have limited experience with basic correctional practices and security operations due to receiving training while normal operations were suspended in response to the pandemic. Recent changes to salary structure, while needed and overall positive, have also resulted in some unintended consequences including: incentivizing non-uniform staff to transition to uniform positions, resulting in increased shortages in program staff; lack of monetary incentive for staff to promote to leadership positions due to close hourly rate (e.g., compression); and high rates of attrition after a very brief tenure.*
- **The department needs more centralization and alignment across institutions and better data collection to improve efficiency, monitoring, and accountability.**
 - *System-wide alignment in the following areas is needed: basic security practices, incident reporting, investigation processes, data collection and reporting, hiring practices. The WIDOC system collects and reports a great deal of data and information. The public-facing dashboard is an example of a best practice. Areas for improvement include expanding data collection and analysis in clinical areas (such as tracking admissions and discharges from mental health and medical units), standardizing data collection, communicating results and findings to staff, establishing systems for frontline staff and leadership to have timely access to current (“real time”) data.*
- **More focus on individuals with significant, complex mental health needs and addressing placement and medical practices.**
 - *The department has the components of a comprehensive mental health program; however, several areas could be improved to focus attention on those with the most significant clinical needs. The system would benefit from: updating the mental health classification system to reflect clinical acuity as well as static conditions; creating additional mental health treatment units with clear admission and discharge criteria; structuring these units to serve the entire department rather than individual sites; monitoring and tracking mental health data more comprehensively throughout the system. Restrictive housing initiatives continue to require support, particularly to improve the conditions for incarcerated individuals housed in restrictive housing, as well as staff working in these settings. Out-of-cell programming and recreation time is very limited. Each*



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individual in restrictive housing should receive a minimum of two hours of out-of-cell time per day. Issues related to polypharmacy were identified, as well as the need for additional medical specialty units. Improvements can also be realized in utilization management, medication administration, and the off-site transfer approval process.