

Wisconsin Dept. of Corrections Will Close Youth Prisons in Wake of Unconstitutional Use of Solitary Confinement, Other Inhumane Conditions

Advocates Celebrate the Closing, Pledge to Vigilantly Continue to Monitor Treatment of Youth Detained

Milwaukee, WI (January 4, 2018) – The Walker administration and the Department of Corrections announced today that they will be closing the Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake state-run youth correctional facilities in Irma. The decision comes following [an injunction](#) secured by the ACLU of Wisconsin and Juvenile Law Center (with pro-bono assistance from Quarles & Brady) [through a class action civil rights lawsuit in federal court](#) centered on the use of solitary confinement, pepper spray, shackling, and strip searches of children. The suit was filed on behalf of youth confined in the Lincoln Hills School for Boys and the Copper Lake School for Girls. The facilities had previously been under investigation for a range of abuses and violations of constitutional rights of the youth.

“The plan to close Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake today is fantastic news,” said Jessica Feerman, associate director of Juvenile Law Center. “This is a huge step forward for Wisconsin. We are relieved that the state is moving away from a model that just doesn’t work -- large youth prisons that violate the Constitution and are dangerous to youth. The task now is to ensure that youth are placed at home or in the most family-like settings possible, and provided with the positive supports and services they deserve.”

Children at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake were routinely placed in solitary confinement, put in mechanical restraints, pepper-sprayed, and strip searched. These facilities incarcerate approximately 150-200 children as young as 14 years old. Prior to state and federal raids on the facility in December 2015, staff also regularly physically abused youth in the facility, even breaking their arms and legs in some cases. Horrific conditions persisted—approximately 15 to 20% percent the young residents were confined in small solitary confinement cells for 22 or 23 hours per day until the injunction.

The closing of the facilities will not be immediate, according to the Department of Corrections. The plan is to move youth to several facilities closer to most of their homes in Southeast Wisconsin.

“While this is a step in the right direction, we will continue to pay attention to how young people are treated while they are moved from the current facilities,” said Larry Dupuis, legal director of ACLU of Wisconsin. “Our lawsuit is against the Department of Corrections officials – not just LHS/CLS - and we will continue to fight to ensure that any resolution of our lawsuit protects these children where they are now as well as at the new facilities.”

Juvenile Law Center advocates for rights, dignity, equity and opportunity for youth in the foster care and justice systems. Founded in 1975, Juvenile Law Center is the first non-profit, public interest law firm for children in the country. We fight for youth through litigation, appellate advocacy and submission of amicus (friend-of-the-court) briefs, policy reform, public education, training, consulting, and strategic communications, we fight for children who come into contact with the child welfare and justice systems. Widely published and internationally recognized as leaders in the field, Juvenile Law Center has substantially shaped the development of law and policy on behalf of youth. We strive to ensure that laws, policies, and

practices affecting youth advance racial and economic equity and are rooted in research, consistent with children's unique developmental characteristics, and reflective of international human rights values. For more information about Juvenile Law Center's work, visit www.JLC.org.

The ACLU of Wisconsin is a non-profit, non-partisan, private organization whose 24,000 members support its efforts to defend the civil rights and liberties of all Wisconsin residents. For more on the ACLU of Wisconsin, visit our website at www.aclu-wi.org, like us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter at @ACLUofWisconsin and @ACLUMadison.

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