

Outdated and Overcapacity: A Smarter Solution to Addressing the Needs of Wisconsin's Maximum Security Prisons

Today, all of Wisconsin's maximum security prisons are at or above operating capacity. In fact, the prison system as a whole is several thousand beds short of what is needed to handle the current and future inmate population. To compound the capacity concerns, the two oldest facilities are **over 100 years old and in need of over \$200 million in repairs**. These capacity and cost concerns have also generated a host of secondary issues, including few safety enhancements options for employees and even few recidivism reductions programs to curb the record-breaking growth in inmate population facing the state's prison system.

While this overwhelming list of challenges have been well known in Madison for almost a decade, the big decisions have been delayed and avoided. One of these facilities, the Green Bay Correctional Institution, resides in my district and embodies all of the operational and financial challenges faced system wide. For this reason, I dedicated all the resources possible to research this issue and this facility to identify nationally proven solutions to these problems.

First, a brief history and geography lesson on the Green Bay Correctional Institution (GBCI). GBCI sits in Green Bay's suburban village of Allouez. When built in 1898 (14 years before Alcatraz), the horse-and-buggy ride from downtown Green Bay made Allouez a reasonable and distant place to build a prison. A century of urban sprawl in the area has resulted in this facility being enveloped by beautiful single-family subdivisions and thriving small businesses. This facility also boasts riverfront acreage and some of the best views of Lambeau Field. In short, GBCI is sitting on some of the most valuable real estate in Brown County.

While GBCI was designed to house 749 inmates, . Today, the facility holds roughly 1,090, putting it at **145% of design capacity**. In 2006, the engineering firm, Mead & Hunt was contracted by the state to understand and report develop a issued a report on the needed repairs to the structure. When the final report was presented to the Department of Corrections, an eye-popping \$142.4 Million in necessary upgrades and repairs were outlined to bring GBCI up to code. This repair list did not include a single new bed to the capacity of the facility. Sadly, almost none of those repairs have been completed, and those same upgrades will cost nearly \$200 million over the next ten years.

Fast forward to today. The state's response to outdated, overcapacity prisons has been limited at best. In the 2017-19 budget, \$22.2 million has been allocated to begin addressing GBCI's repair needs. Why are taxpayers making any investment in a 119-year-old facility?

Rather than continuing to pour money into a facility that is outdated and overcapacity, as a steward of taxpayer dollars, it is my responsibility to demand a better answer. Absent a sudden appetite to bond for a bigger, better facility, the state must develop an innovative approach to solving this problem. A partnership, between the public and private sector, offers the solution our prison system so desperately needs.

Under a partnership solution, the state would decommission GBCI, and a new privately owned, publicly operated facility would be leased by the state. A ten-year financial forecast based on a new 1300 bed facility indicates that taxpayers stand to save over \$150 million through this public/private lease (with option to purchase) model. The private sector has a history of delivering projects at a more cost-effective rate than the state. A new facility, which would be constructed to state specifications, and would be run by state employees, not private sector employees. Taxpayers would no longer need to pour \$200 million into GBCI, and a new facility with modernized design and technology would allow for significant operational efficiencies. In addition, the partnership model allows the taxpayers to avoid a single lease payment until the new facility is occupied - unlike a publicly financed model, which would require the taxpayers to begin making payments years before occupancy.

A modernized, adequately sized facility means greater care and control of inmates. Modern design layout and technology provides Wisconsin Correctional Officers a safer workplace, while also lending itself to better educational, vocational, and mental health opportunities for inmates.

A final benefit realized through this model is to the communities directly impacted: Allouez and the new host community. GBCI is uniquely located on a highly valuable piece of property with an estimated build-out value of \$80 million. Allouez is anxious at the redevelopment opportunity. The new host community also stands to benefit. As a privately owned facility, the new prison will become a significant property tax payer and revenue generator for the host.

GBCI, with its unmatched maintenance needs, overwhelming capacity concerns, and highly supportive communities, presents the perfect opportunity for the state to address a very old problem with a new, forwarding thinking solution. This solution is a benefit to taxpayers statewide and establishes a new option to addressing the long-term needs of prisons throughout Wisconsin.

However, time and growth has resulted in this facility becoming enveloped by beautiful single-family subdivisions that include million-dollar homes that are literally down the street from the prison. This facility also boasts riverfront acreage and some of the best views of Lambeau Field. In short, GBCI is sitting on some of the most valuable real estate in Brown County.