

DOC Action in Response to Events at Copper Lake/Lincoln Hills Schools

Summary: The care and safety of youth in Department of Corrections (DOC) custody is the highest priority of the Department. All persons identified as harming youth or placing youth at risk of harm have been put on administrative leave pending investigation and are not allowed on institution grounds. If any additional people are identified, they will be immediately removed from the institution and placed on leave pending investigation. The Department is taking aggressive action to investigate past misconduct, ensure immediate safety of youth, and strengthen school operations moving forward.

Late last year, the DOC became aware of possible mistreatment of youth at Copper Lake / Lincoln Hills Schools (CLS/LHS) by staff members. The DOC made a report to the Lincoln County Sheriff immediately and requested a neutral and detached investigation by the Wisconsin Department of Justice, Division of Criminal Investigation in January, 2015. That investigation is ongoing and we continue to cooperate in every way possible.

The DOC has, throughout the course of the investigation, taken steps to mitigate any threat to the youth in our care. We have placed every individual employee identified as possibly involved in any mistreatment, abuse or neglect on administrative leave pending a full investigation. The DOC will not tolerate any employee found to have engaged in behavior that has placed youth at risk or failed to meet the integrity standards expected of DOC employees.

In response to information from DOJ and internal reviews, the DOC has taken immediate steps to address concerns that were raised. These steps include:

1. Appointing a new Administrator of the Division of Juvenile Corrections.
2. Appointing a new Superintendent of CLS/LHS.
3. Expediting all investigative and disciplinary proceedings against any staff member who has been identified as being involved in abuse, neglect, or any other misconduct towards any youth in our custody now or in the past.
4. Referring any allegations of abuse, misuse of authority, or youth injury to the Office of the Secretary.
5. Coordinating with the DOJ Office of Crime Victim Services and the DOC Office of Victim Services and Programs to assure that all youth and their families are afforded victim services as required or requested.
6. Assigning additional psychological staff to youth at CLS/LHS.
7. Assigning security supervisors from other DOC facilities on every shift to assist with institution oversight, respond to any incidents that occur, and address youth complaints. One of these supervisors was specifically assigned to monitor the safety of an individual youth who was injured.
8. Creating and implementing an aggressive training plan to bring all security staff to the highest standards, with an emphasis on professional communication skills, de-escalation, intermediate control methods, use of force, incident response protocols, evidence collection, and documentation. This advanced training for CLS/LHS supervisory staff is underway, and training for the remainder of all security staff will commence immediately thereafter.

9. Revising the youth complaint procedure to ensure that youth complaints are stored securely, retrieved only by the Superintendent or designee, and responded to promptly and appropriately.
10. Establishing a youth injury review panel that includes DJC administration, the Office of the Secretary, and the Office of Legal Counsel. The panel will review every injury to youth, regardless of how the injury was sustained.
11. An assessment of technological needs has been completed to ensure broader monitoring and recording, installation of additional video cameras in critical areas, and implementing a comprehensive camera upgrade project. In addition, DOC is purchasing body cameras to be worn by security staff in certain units, which will be mandatory in recording all interactions with youth during acts of youth aggression, crisis intervention, and other circumstances.
12. Reviewing all cases in which use of force was utilized against any youth in our custody, currently or in the past, to ascertain any staff patterns or physical locations where extra security is required.
13. Reviewing and updating all policies and procedures for documenting serious incidents and ensuring that all necessary notifications occur.

All of the above steps are being taken under the leadership of the new DJC Administrator and CLS/LHS Superintendent, with active oversight by the Department's Office of the Secretary, Office of Legal Counsel and Office of Special Operations. In addition, expert resources from throughout the Department have been deployed to assist in these steps by providing training, conducting investigations, reviewing and revising protocols and procedures, and supplementing CLS/LHS staff where necessary. The DOC is committed to our vitally important mission of public safety, while protecting our staff and those in our custody. We will spare no effort to ensure these goals are met.