

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

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DOC Secretary Edward Wall Resigns

About a week ago, DOC Secretary Edward Wall resigned and was replaced by previous DOC Secretary Litscher to temporarily fill the position. The resignation was in response to the surfacing of widespread allegations of abuse at the juvenile prisons run by the state: Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake.

There has been an ongoing investigation for months with DOC officials and Gov. Walker claiming not to have known what was going on. However, a Racine County judge released a copy of a letter he sent to Gov. Walker in 2012 highlighting abuses and requesting an investigation. Gov. Walker denied any knowledge of the letter and to show he takes the abuse allegations seriously, he fired his DOC secretary.

The problem wasn't with Secretary Wall, but rather his subordinates - every one of which was promoted from within. The DOC administration is an insular group of officials who all share the same mind set and who regularly protect each other to further their draconian agenda. For decades, DOC officials have promoted the worst of the worst to positions of power and encouraged them in their oppression.

What the DOC needs is fresh blood. Appoint a new secretary with a degree in psychology or sociology and no experience in corrections. Put a stop to the mind set that the more you restrict prisoners and the worse you treat them, the better the prison system is. Wisconsin needs to create a correctional system that nurtures and heals its captives. The DOC currently does nothing to address an individual's needs. They have one-size-fits-all programs that they force prisoners to take and which generally do no good whatsoever. Once the program is completed, the prisoners get the DOC stamp of approval. Then, surprise, surprise, the person returns to prison a short time later and nobody can figure out why.

I was recently given a COMPAS evaluation - a computer program intended to assess risk to reoffend. The program determined that I was low risk to reoffend but recommended that I take CGIP - a cognitive program to teach me how to think. I can't figure out what it's based on. My perfect conduct record over my 31 years in prison? My clinical services evaluation which found me to be "prosocial, rational and responsible"? My age of 62 years? My time on work release? It's ridiculous!

To sum it up, we have a correctional system that routinely makes people worse. When it does mandate programs, it uses a shotgun approach that mandates programs for prisoners regardless of whether the program is needed or will do any good.

Each year, conditions in the prison system get worse. We are fed worse food, subjected to harsher rules, more uncomfortable living conditions and expected to serve more and more time. When will it end?

As long as right-wing ideologues like Gov. Walker run this state, there is little chance for improvement. We need to change the culture within the DOC and that will only happen when the entrenched bureaucracy is removed and outsiders with no previous correctional experience are brought in to start over with a clean slate.