http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/boy-in-doc-s5.jpg 

Media reports last month revealed state officials at the highest levels have known for years of attacks and sexual assaults at Lincoln Hills School for Boys without either contacting or fully disclosing the details to concerned local officials or even the family members of the victims. This mistreatment of inmates and the underlying issues it reveals in DOC cause twelve legislators to request independent investigation by Legislative Audit Bureau.

MADISON - The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported in February that in repeated cases stretching back at least four years, state officials at the highest levels have known of attacks and sexual assaults at Lincoln Hills School for Boys. What's more, they admit no one bothered telling parents and local officials about the assaults on teenagers at a troubled prison.

The pattern of not sharing glaring problems continued for years, according to leaders in two counties, state officials, former Lincoln Hills staff and a parent of a juvenile inmate.

The whole mess was uncovered last December when federal agents raided the school and a massive federal and state investigation at the Northwoods prison and the sister facility on its campus, Copper Lake School for Girls went public.

Gov. Scott Walker's administration initially blamed the problems on front-line staff alone. But soon it became clear it was a larger failure at the Department of Corrections (DOC) and the Walker administration that had been covered up. Senate Republican legislators have since shirked their legal responsibility to investigate.

The appalling treatment of juveniles at Lincoln Hills is only the tip of the iceberg. Underlying grave issues of safety, overcrowding, repeat offenders, mental illness among inmates and management issues exist in our corrections system that are costing the state in dollars and

safety of residents. It is time to bring these problems into the light of day.



On Tuesday, Sen. **Kathleen Vinehout** (D-Alma) was joined by Sen. **Dave Hansen** (D-Green Bay) and **ten other state legislators** in a written request to Joint Legislative Audit Committee co-chairs Sen. **Rob Cowles** (R-Green Bay) and Rep. **Samantha Kirkland** (R-Salem) for a public hearing to approve an audit of DOC by the independent Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB).

“The Department of Corrections is facing severe difficulties that require our immediate response,” said Senator Vinehout Tuesday. “I call upon my fellow members of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee to approve an audit of DOC. This audit is necessary to address grave issues of safety, overcrowding, repeat offenders, mental illness among inmates and management issues that are costing the state in dollars and safety of residents.”

Vinehout authored a letter requesting the Joint Audit Committee Co-Chairs to schedule a hearing to consider an audit of DOC. The letter was co-signed by over 40 legislators from around the state. The legislators share concern related to a number of issues including staff shortages, forced overtime and the reports of appalling treatment of juveniles at Lincoln Hills.

“The well-respected, nonpartisan, Legislative Audit Bureau has the know-how to understand the systemic problems faced by DOC and help lawmakers craft solutions,” said Vinehout. “A comprehensive program evaluation could identify challenging safety issues before people are hurt; help policy makers target resources to alleviate overcrowding; and spur needed changes in mental health treatment and the reintegration system to address the extraordinarily high number of those returning to prison.”

“Lives are at stake – the lives of staff, children and adult inmates. Enough anecdotal evidence exists to give us stark warning signs – something must be done. A nonpartisan audit could provide direction to move forward from the current crisis,” concluded Vinehout.