

## Caring For Our Most Vulnerable

Written by Jennifer Shilling, State Senator 32nd District

Friday, 30 September 2016 13:54 - Last Updated Friday, 30 September 2016 14:28

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<http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/veteran-home-s5.jpg>



***From sexual assaults at the Lincoln Hills School for youth to financial mismanagement and neglect at the King Veteran Home, Gov. Walker and his Republican legislature have let down our families. We can't delay action any longer.***

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LA CROSSE, WI - Vulnerable children and aging veterans in Wisconsin need our help. Shocking investigative reports have exposed a range of problems at the King Veteran Home and the Lincoln Hills School for youth. From assaults and infection outbreaks to outdated facilities and financial mismanagement, Gov. Walker and his Republican legislature have failed Wisconsin families.



At the King nursing facility, veterans and family members are concerned about worsening conditions and ongoing staff shortages. For more than a year, workers have complained of urine-soaked carpeting, tainted drinking water and outdated medical equipment.

Instead of approving \$18 million in facility repairs and upgrades, Gov. Walker diverted \$12 million from the veteran nursing home fund to backfill budget deficits. Republican leaders are set to raid another \$18 million from King over the next two years.

Similar problems exist at the Lincoln Hills School in northern Wisconsin. Staff vacancies and inadequate facilities are jeopardizing safety and putting children at risk. Assaults have become all too common and the Department of Justice is currently investigating several reports of child neglect, intimidation of witnesses and tampering with public records.

Families have been left to wonder: Is this really the best we can do? Shouldn't the care and safety of Wisconsin children and veterans be a top priority?

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What's become painfully clear after numerous investigative reports is that these problems didn't pop up overnight. They've been allowed to fester for years under an administration that operates in secrecy, discourages transparency and refuses to accept responsibility.

Gov. Walker spent millions of dollars and countless hours traveling across the country in pursuit of his presidential ambitions. Had that same attention been paid to the concerns of children and veterans here in Wisconsin, perhaps we could have avoided the crisis we currently find ourselves in.

But we're here now and families deserve solutions. We can't delay action any longer, so let's roll up our sleeves and get to work.

Security upgrades at Lincoln Hills and an overhaul of the tainted drinking water system at the King Veteran Home are badly needed. Rather than delaying infrastructure investments, we should immediately approve shovel-ready projects and rehabilitate outdated facilities.

Staff shortages have worsened as a result of pay cuts, forced overtime and safety concerns. We can reduce staff turnover by fairly compensating employees, improving working conditions and limiting the unsustainable use of forced overtime.

Rather than more tax breaks for multi-millionaires, we should prioritize funding for these facilities, improve services and expand opportunities for residents. And we should immediately block Gov. Walker's plan to raid \$18 million from our veteran nursing homes.

Care for our veterans shouldn't suffer as a result of Gov. Walker's fiscal mismanagement.

We need leaders willing to put aside personal ambitions and stand up for those who have been silenced and marginalized for too long.

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Legislative Democrats will continue to push for action until Wisconsin families receive the care and attention they deserve.

This election, help us protect Wisconsin children and veterans by voting for leaders who will focus on proven solutions rather than personal ambitions.

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*Jennifer Shilling represents the 32nd Senate District in western Wisconsin and currently serves as the Wisconsin Senate Democratic Leader.*