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### **Testimony introducing LD 1683, “Resolve, To Compensate Department of Corrections Employees for Hazardous Work”**

Presented by Representative Bill Pluecker, House District 95. Presented to the Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee, Monday, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and other distinguished members of the Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee. I am Representative Bill Pluecker and I represent House District 95 which is Appleton, Hope, part of the town of Union, and Warren. Thank you for the chance to present LD 1683, “Resolve, To Compensate Department of Corrections Employees for Hazardous Work”.

One of the first things that the Governor ordered as the Pandemic began last year was that those with direct resident contact in our prisons receive an additional five dollar an hour stipend while on the job. The reason that such quick action was taken was the realization that if we started having COVID outbreaks in the prisons, with the current low staffing levels due to poor pay, our correctional officers might have stopped showing up to work and we would have had a crisis inside. As this committee is quite aware, our correctional officers are regularly mandated after their twelve-hour shift to continue working because there are not sufficient staff in the facility to maintain safety and security. Many of us are also aware that the staff could make more money working in a security capacity in other much less demanding arenas such as banks or BIW. Our staff work under extremely difficult circumstances and are not paid enough.

That five dollar an hour stipend continued until the end of the year when the first wave of federal dollars was spent. The danger did not stop. In fact, MSP did not have a COVID outbreak at the prison until 2021 this past Spring. MCC has had various outbreaks throughout the Spring. The danger of getting COVID inside continues, but the hazard pay has not. The correctional officers continue to show up to work, potentially bringing the sickness back to their families and loved ones.

**District 95: Appleton, Hope, (part) Union & Warren**

They continue to show up because walking away from their responsibility is not an option, certainly not because they are paid adequately for the work they do.

At the time that I submitted this bill, we did not know about the American Rescue Plan Act or any of the rest of the money coming from the federal government, but I figured that we were likely to see some coming. This bill is simple in its action. If money comes from the federal government that is permitted by the federal rules to be used to pay correctional officers hazard pay, then we must make our correctional officers whole. We must pay them the stipend for the hours that they have been putting in since the start of the year when they were coming to work and risking their health for the functioning of our prisons, and they must be paid hazard pay until the emergency is declared over by the governor.

The officers have been crucial to the functioning of the prisons and the Department of Corrections' nation leading control of COVID inside the prisons. This would not have been possible if our correctional officers had not accepted the risk and gone to work despite the conditions. Properly compensating them for the work they have done, and the service they have provided the state must be our highest priority as a legislature and as a government. Please join me in showing our support of our officers and support the passage of this resolve.

Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions.