

Chair Carlos Mariani and members of the Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Policy and Finance Committee:

We would like to thank Governor Tim Walz, his commissioners, and this committee for bringing forward a budget proposal that includes critical operating adjustments to maintain our current levels of quality state services while also expanding in important areas like inspectors for local jails. While MAPE supports the overall bill proposal, we do have concerns in several critical areas.

Minnesota's correctional system is predominately community based; over 103,000 individuals were on some level of community supervision compared to roughly 8,000 incarcerated in state facilities in 2020. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, corrections agents endured large caseloads under a system that was already transitioning away from incarceration. While Minnesota is no longer at the record high levels of the late 2000s largely due to the decrease in juveniles and misdemeanors being sentenced to supervision, adult felony cases have continued to trend upwards. As Commissioner Paul Schnell has consistently stated, the DOC is making a comprehensive effort to continue to reduce the prison population as community alternatives to incarceration can offer a more holistic approach to rehabilitation and reintegration. For this to be successful, however, agents need to have manageable caseloads to provide those services effectively. We cannot wait to add more agents during the transition; the infrastructure needs to be in place beforehand to ensure success for the clients and the safety of our agents in field services.

The Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act (MRRA) in Article 4 is a transformative and holistic proposal that could have a sizeable impact on connecting individuals with the services they need to successively return to the community. MAPE shares the goals envisioned in this plan, but as there is little clarity on the operative process and no increase in staff for the initial ramp up in this proposal, we are concerned that this initiative will place an untenable amount of work on staff tasked with completing the individualized assessments and comprehensive rehabilitation plans. This is especially true at the only two facilities doing intake, St. Cloud and Shakopee, where three caseworker positions were eliminated in July 2020. With very little detail as to how the MRRA will affect current responsibilities of our members, we are concerned that this initiative lacks the resources to be successful.

We're hopeful that the new taskforce being created to reevaluate when felony presentence investigative (PSIs) reports are necessary will lead to a decrease in the hours agents spend on writing these documents, particularly for low level offenses. The amount of time required to complete these documents diminishes the time agents can spend with their clients to ensure they have all the resources and services necessary to reintegrate back into the communities in which they reside.

Finally, COVID-19 did not erase the safety concerns raised in the 2019 OLA report on safety in our corrections facilities. We expect the legislature and the department to address more of those concerns in future sessions.

Despite these concerns, we ask that the legislature support H.F. 1078 to ensure that the quality of services our state employees in public safety will not diminish and that current staffing levels will be maintained.