

## HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 310

Reps. Lightner, Bollin, Prestin, Markkanen, Beson, Bierlein, Roth, Conlin, Aragona, Cavitt, Phil Green, Beeler, Rigas, Friske, Wozniak and Thompson offered the following resolution:

1       A resolution calling on Heidi Washington, Director of the  
2 Michigan Department of Corrections, to resign.

3       Whereas, Heidi Washington was first appointed to the position  
4 of Director of the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) in  
5 2015. Since that time, she has failed to address a number of issues  
6 within correctional facilities throughout the state, which have  
7 resulted in dangerous working conditions for our corrections  
8 officers; and

9       Whereas, One of the biggest challenges that corrections  
10 officers within the MDOC have faced under the Heidi Washington  
11 administration is severe staffing shortages. This has forced

1 officers to work mandatory doubles, meaning that they are working  
2 16-hour shifts multiple times a week. Anonymous corrections  
3 officers have reached out to their legislators, reporting that they  
4 have fallen asleep behind the wheel and even slept in their  
5 vehicles due to the excessive amounts of overtime that they are  
6 being forced to work. This has taken a heavy toll on our officers,  
7 impacting not only their mental health but their relationships with  
8 their families; and

9       Whereas, In October 2018, the Michigan Corrections  
10 Organization, the union organization charged with advocating for  
11 and protecting Michigan's corrections officers, sent a letter to  
12 Heidi Washington outlining the concerns held by many within the  
13 MDOC. These concerns were accompanied by specific examples of  
14 issues being faced by corrections officers in MDOC facilities.  
15 However, these calls for help went unanswered; and

16       Whereas, In 2020, another letter was sent to Heidi Washington  
17 by the Michigan Corrections Organization outlining additional  
18 concerns, while also expressing a lack of faith in Heidi  
19 Washington's ability to lead the MDOC effectively. Concerns raised  
20 within this letter included not only the staffing shortages, but  
21 also a lack of transparency from the administrative arm of the  
22 MDOC, failures to properly report prisoner disturbances, and  
23 reckless and unfounded comments made by MDOC officials about the  
24 corrections officers' role in bringing the COVID-19 virus into the  
25 prisons. These and other problems produced dangerous working  
26 conditions in correctional facilities, causing employees to  
27 experience low morale, depression, anxiety, and fear; and

28       Whereas, Despite the growing public attention to and  
29 recognition of the many dangerous conditions that corrections

1 officers are facing, little has been done to remedy these issues,  
2 which has caused a continuing high vacancy rate for officers.  
3 According to information from the Michigan Corrections  
4 Organization, from July 1, 2024 to July 18, 2024, at the Baraga  
5 Correctional Facility, which is a maximum-security facility,  
6 corrections officers were working at a 34 percent vacancy rate.  
7 This resulted in 544 overtime shifts and 135 violations of the  
8 MDOC's 32-hour rule, which is designed to protect officers from  
9 excessive overtime. During this same period of time, there were 350  
10 instances of "closed" officer positions, meaning that a corrections  
11 officer was not stationed at a required position within the  
12 facility; and

13       Whereas, These types of disturbing figures can be found within  
14 other MDOC facilities as well, showing that these issues are not  
15 limited to a specific facility and its staff, but are indicative of  
16 department-wide failures. At the Marquette Branch Prison, which is  
17 another maximum-security facility, the vacancy rate currently  
18 hovers around 33 percent. From July 1, 2024 to July 28, 2024, there  
19 were 785 overtime shifts and 519 "closed" officer positions.  
20 Chippewa Correctional Facility has reached a vacancy rate of 27  
21 percent, resulting in 1,948 overtime shifts from July 1, 2024 to  
22 July 31, 2024; and

23       Whereas, Due to the high vacancy rates of corrections  
24 officers, since the beginning of July 2024, there have been  
25 numerous instances of violence that have erupted at prisons across  
26 the state. These incidents have resulted in officers being forced  
27 to use tear gas, tasers, and pepper ball launchers. On July 6,  
28 2024, at Chippewa Correctional Facility, a corrections officer was  
29 punched in the face by an inmate several times, resulting in the

1 officer suffering a fractured orbital bone. Officers have  
2 anonymously reported to their legislators that they are often  
3 forced to staff dangerous portions of Michigan's correctional  
4 facilities with untrained or minimal peer support, highlighting a  
5 lack of empathy and care that Heidi Washington and the rest of the  
6 MDOC administration have for the safety of our corrections  
7 officers; and

8       Whereas, Conditions within MDOC correctional facilities remain  
9 so dangerous that the Michigan Corrections Organization has called  
10 upon Governor Whitmer to activate the National Guard to offer aid.  
11 However, Governor Whitmer has failed to fulfill or otherwise  
12 acknowledge this justifiable and urgent request, just as Heidi  
13 Washington ineffectually did not join in on the call for action.  
14 Similarly, neither Heidi Washington nor Governor Whitmer has  
15 publicly demanded that the Civil Service Commission take any action  
16 within the scope of its powers, such as remedying the financial  
17 standing for retention and recruitment, to address the dangerous  
18 realities of our state correctional facilities. Rather, both  
19 leaders chose to blatantly ignore the plea for help and continue to  
20 perpetuate the unacceptable status quo; and

21       Whereas, Corrections officers within the MDOC have reported to  
22 their state legislators stories about a disturbing culture of fear  
23 and retaliation that has been perpetuated within the department. An  
24 understanding has settled over employees that if an officer does  
25 not toe the line or tries to take basic actions such as reporting  
26 inappropriate behavior, calling in sick, or requesting time off,  
27 the corrections officer will be reprimanded and bullied by  
28 leadership and peers. Officers report having their requests for  
29 leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act denied and then

1 receiving disciplinary questionnaires if they fail to comply with  
2 the denial. If an officer declines mandatory overtime, they are  
3 sometimes forced to take additional time off as retaliation; and

4       Whereas, The Legislature has made a number of attempts to  
5 increase funding for the MDOC to address the staffing crisis and  
6 otherwise cure some of the issues facing the department. However,  
7 these efforts have been met with resistance from the executive  
8 branch, which includes Heidi Washington and the Civil Service  
9 Commission. In 2019, the Governor vetoed millions of dollars that  
10 was set aside for training new corrections officers in order to  
11 remediate the increased number of MDOC employees becoming eligible  
12 for retirement. In 2021, the House of Representatives attempted to  
13 set aside 34 million dollars in federal COVID-19 money to restore  
14 sick and annual leave time for MDOC staff. However, this effort  
15 remained without support from the executive branch, and was  
16 ultimately excluded from the state budget. In 2022, the executive  
17 failed to support any of the attempts by the House of  
18 Representatives to allocate federal COVID-19 dollars to a variety  
19 of programs aimed at addressing the issues within the MDOC,  
20 including signing and retention bonuses. All of these programs were  
21 cut from the final budget. Again in 2023, efforts by the  
22 Legislature to allocate money to the MDOC for retention and signing  
23 bonuses, directly attempting to stem the flow of the staffing  
24 crisis, was foiled by the executive, which removed the bonuses from  
25 the final budget; and

26       Whereas, The executive branch's failure to meet the needs of  
27 those who work on the frontlines of the MDOC has not been limited  
28 to the financials. In 2019, the executive rid the budget of  
29 boilerplate language that protected MDOC staff from retaliation if

1 they spoke to legislators. In 2021, a number of amendments were  
2 made to boilerplate terms by the executive that served to either  
3 delete or weaken department reporting requirements. As recently as  
4 the 2023 budget, the executive once again attempted to water down  
5 the reporting requirements for the MDOC, particularly those in  
6 relation to retention. Thus, the Governor, the Civil Service  
7 Commission, and Heidi Washington have together stymied the efforts  
8 of corrections officers and the Legislature to improve conditions  
9 in MDOC facilities; and

10 Whereas, The Director of a principal state department is  
11 charged with the responsibility of supervising and controlling the  
12 affairs of their department. This includes advocating to the  
13 Governor, the Civil Service Commission, and the state for items  
14 that would better meet the needs of the department and help them  
15 carry out their duties. Heidi Washington has failed in her duties  
16 to advocate for the MDOC and its dedicated public servants; and

17 Whereas, Heidi Washington's narrow-minded focus on recruitment  
18 rather than retention has exacerbated pre-existing issues within  
19 the MDOC and has continued to lead to high turnover. Corrections  
20 officers are continuously expected to sacrifice time with their  
21 families, being forced to use their limited time off resting and  
22 fighting off exhaustion. Their personal lives have been surrendered  
23 to the MDOC, with no support being offered by the department. Once  
24 a profession that instilled pride in its civil servants,  
25 corrections officers of today actively encourage peers to retire,  
26 while warning friends and family away from careers within the MDOC  
27 due to the continued failures of leadership; and

28 Whereas, Heidi Washington's failures are so widespread and  
29 systemic that a change in leadership is the only way to move

1 forward. Corrections officers within the MDOC have been put into an  
2 extremely dangerous situation, only to be met with empty promises  
3 and a lack of results; and

4       Whereas, Heidi Washington has lost the confidence of the House  
5 of Representatives, and it is time for the MDOC to have a Director  
6 who is interested in and capable of fixing the various issues that  
7 exist within the department; now, therefore, be it

8       Resolved by the House of Representatives, That we call on  
9 Heidi Washington, Director of the Michigan Department of  
10 Corrections, to resign; and be it further

11       Resolved, That a copy of this resolution be transmitted to  
12 Director Washington.