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## Budget lays out prison mental health upgrades

MADISON (AP) — Gov. Jim Doyle's budget lays out millions of dollars to help female prisoners get better mental health care and dodge a potentially costly lawsuit over their care.

The U.S. Justice Department in 2006 declared the lack of mental health care at Taycheedah Correctional Institution, the state's largest women's prison in Fond du Lac, violated inmates' constitutional rights. The state agreed this past September to make improvements or face a U.S. Justice Department lawsuit.

"These investments will help us improve the continuity of care for women who have mental illnesses in our prison system," Corrections Department spokesman John Dipko said in a statement.

Part of the state's plan calls for building a 45-bed women's-only wing at the Wisconsin Resource Center, a mental health facility for male inmates in Winnebago. The \$11 million project was approved as part of the state's 2007-09 capital budget. It's set to open in 2011.

Doyle's spending plan sets out \$4.6 million in taxpayer dollars for the Department of Health and Human Services to hire 113 workers at the facility in 2011. The governor's budget also devotes another \$4.2 million in taxpayer dollars to hire 15 guards for the female-only wing and another 40 mental health workers at Taycheedah.

The spending proposals come despite the state's massive \$5.7 billion deficit, brought on because state agency spending requests outpace projected revenue. Doyle spokeswoman Carla Vigue had no immediate comment Monday.

Federal investigators toured Taycheedah in 2005. They found mentally ill inmates locked in isolation cells and given psychotropic drugs without a doctor's supervision.

Under the agreement with U.S. justice officials, corrections officials have up to four years to make improvements or face a lawsuit. The agency's plan includes the women-only wing at the Wisconsin Resource Center, mental health screens for inmates within 24 hours of arriving at Taycheedah and additional mental health staff at the prison.

The agreement also appointed Dr. Jeffrey L. Metzner as joint consultant for both corrections and U.S. DOJ and granted Metzner extensive access to the prison and agency records.

The American Civil Liberties Union filed a federal class-action lawsuit in Milwaukee in 2006 on behalf of Taycheedah prisoners. The suit claimed the prison's medical, mental and dental care is grossly deficient and caused its female prisoners great physical and mental suffering.

State attorneys have countered no evidence shows systemic indifference to inmates' medical needs.

ACLU Wisconsin Executive Director Chris Ahmuty didn't immediately return a message.

The state Senate and Assembly must pass identical versions of the budget and Doyle, a Democrat, must sign it before it can become law. Doyle's party controls both legislative houses, making it likely he'll get what he wants.

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