

Rhoden Needs to Clean Up D.O.C. Before Prison Vote

September 1, 2025

On September 23, 2025, at a special legislative session, we will be asked to entrust \$650 Million to the Secretary of the Department of Corrections within the Rhoden Administration. We do not have trust in the leadership of Rhoden's Department of Corrections. We are renewing the call for Governor Rhoden to clean up his Department of Corrections before the special session vote on the new prison in Sioux Falls.

To be clear, we have been among the loudest and most consistent voices affirming the need for a new prison. Public safety demands it and common sense recommends it. The current facility has outlived its useful life and is not appropriate for the correctional officers, staff or inmates who live and work behind its walls. There are concerns ranging from the safety of the staff to the rehabilitation of the inmates, all of which deserve to be addressed. We worked with Governor Noem to fund and construct the new women's prison in Rapid City and have listened to law enforcement and prosecutors across the state. We know we need a new men's prison facility.

However, many of those same members of law enforcement and same prosecutors have been raising alarms about the operations Department of Corrections under the Rhoden Administration. Representative Tim Reisch, former Adjutant General of the National Guard, Secretary of Corrections, and Sheriff, raised these operational concerns in chapter-and-verse months ago. The Rhoden Administration responded with general denials and no apparent improvements. That is the wrong approach. This is a time when we need accountability and a restoration of trust from the Rhoden Administration, not blinders and not blame-shifting.

Setting the operational issues aside, the Rhoden Administration stood before the legislature six months ago and told us that a 1,500 bed men's prison would cost \$825 Million. Today, the same people are telling us a 1,500 bed men's prison costs \$650 Million. Based on politics emerging from the proposed Lincoln County site, the legislature did not authorize construction. Still, many of us supported building the new prison and trusted the Rhoden Department of Corrections with their cost estimates. That trust is gone. As with the operational problems, there has been no accountability and no concrete explanation of how the Administration overestimated the cost by \$175 Million.

It is time for the Rhoden Administration to clean up its mess at the Department of Corrections. We want to be full supporters of the construction of the prison on September 23. Our main hesitation is entrusting the current leadership with such a substantial task and amount of taxpayer money. These issues have been clearly presented to Governor Rhoden for months. It is time to take accountability and attempt to restore trust.

Faithfully Submitted,

Rep. Tim Reisch (R-Howard)

Rep. Will Mortenson (R-Fort Pierre)

Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt (R-Sioux Falls)

Rep. Mike Stevens (R-Yankton)

Rep. Amber Arlint (R-Sioux Falls)

Rep. Tim Walburg (R-Madison)

Rep. Kevin Van Diepen (R-Huron)

Rep. Kent Roe (R-Hazel)

Rep. Drew Peterson (R-Salem)

Rep. Matt Roby (R-Watertown)

Rep. Rebecca Reimer (R-Chamberlain)

Rep. Roger DeGroot (R-Brookings)

Rep. Tim Goodwin (R-Rapid City)

Rep. Bill Shorma (R-Dakota Dunes)

Rep. Jeff Bathka (R-Mitchell)

Rep. Trish Ladner (R-Hot Springs)

Rep. Steve Duffy (R-Rapid City)

Rep. Tim Czmowski (R-Sioux Falls)

Rep. Keri Weems (R-Sioux Falls)

Rep. Jim Halverson (R-Winner)