

September 1, 2025

The Honorable Larry Rhoden
Governor of South Dakota
500 E. Capitol
Pierre, SD 57501

Dear Governor Rhoden,

I am writing this letter to inform you that I am submitting my resignation, to be effective October 20, 2025. I have been discussing this decision with my family over the course of the last few months and have made the decision to seek other opportunities. This decision was not taken lightly, and I am thankful for the incredible executive team that has been established and will remain committed to the Department of Corrections (DOC) in my absence.

I have worked diligently for the last 3 ½ years to improve the Department of Corrections and know that I am leaving it far better than I found it. To share some of the greatest accomplishments with you, here are just a handful:

- Increased officer pay 43%;
- Decreased the uniformed officer vacancy rate from 36% to 3%;
- Established organization alignment consistent with the CGL report to include implementing an Office of the Inspector General;
- Purchased all new equipment for every facility and upgraded all radios statewide;
- Implemented secure perimeters of all facilities, including the minimum custody facilities;
- Established secure points of entry at every facility to include metal detectors and property searches;
- Established policies consistent with the American Correctional Association and national best practices;
- Established a comprehensive reentry program;
- Implemented medication assisted treatment statewide;
- Cured over 300 offenders with Hepatitis C with direct acting antiviral treatment;
- Established a Basic Training Academy with proprietary lesson plans and evidence-based practices to ensure new officers and all staff are prepared for working in a prison setting;
- Established duty officers at every facility with complete training to ensure facility operations are compliant and consistent;

- Contracted a new food service vendor which resulted in a tremendous decline in offender grievances;
- Established staff break rooms through our food service vendor where staff can relax and have meals prepared or can purchase from onsite markets;
- Established a Field Training Officer program at every facility;
- Established a case management model to allow for case managers to work with offenders to pursue programming and educational needs early in their incarceration;
- Established new Risk-Needs-Responsivity assessment tools to allow for inmates to be assessed for programming on intake and begin their rehabilitation throughout their incarceration, not just at the last 6 months of it;
- Accomplished CGL recommendation #33 which required us to have our classification tool re-validated and to look at inmate discipline sanctions and housing assignments. This would be the insolvency process that is highly controversial with my predecessor. It was necessary, and we have successfully corrected the process;
- Established tool control at all facilities. There was no tool control, regardless of what anyone tells you. It was non-existent;
- Reduced escapes from their previous level of 41 in FY2022 to 1 in FY 2025;
- Designed 2 prisons, one of which will be operational in 2026; and
- Established excellent relationships and partnerships with law enforcement.

We have taken on a tremendous responsibility the last 3 ½ years to make the South Dakota DOC a modern operation, and I am proud of the work that has been done.

I thank you for the opportunity to remain on your team after Governor Noem's departure and wish you nothing but the best.

Respectfully,



Kellie Wasko
Cabinet Secretary