



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Focused on Rehabilitation: Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Unveils ‘Little Scandinavia’ at SCI Chester

Harrisburg, PA – Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) Acting Secretary George Little was joined by partners from the Norwegian Correctional Service (*Kriminalomsorgen*), the Swedish Prison and Probation Service (*Kriminalvården*), Drexel University, and the University of Oslo to officially dedicate the Little Scandinavia Unit at SCI Chester.

The Scandinavian model of incarceration focuses on rehabilitation and reintegration. Little Scandinavia will incorporate ideas and concepts from Scandinavian prisons to determine their impact on staff and inmate wellness, prison culture, and recidivism.

The project began in 2017, when Drexel University facilitated a visit to SCI Chester with Norwegian prison officials. A group of DOC personnel, including the superintendent, unit manager and corrections officers, later traveled to Norway, Sweden and Denmark in 2019. As part of that trip, officers gained firsthand experience working in a Norwegian prison setting for several weeks. The team set out to design their own unit based on what they experienced, and renovations to the unit that became Little Scandinavia started soon after. In 2022, after the project had been put on pause for nearly two years because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the full team returned to Sweden before finalizing the policies and structural layout of the unit.

“The vision of Little Scandinavia is to create a more humane prison environment, including a dramatic shift in how staff and the incarcerated population interact,” said Acting Secretary Little. “This reform will allow everyone living and working on the unit to focus on reintegration into society in a substantial way.”

Residents of Little Scandinavia have access to a communal kitchen, a landscaped green space, and radically redesigned cells, furniture, and common areas. The population will also receive specialized programming to help prepare for reentry. The unit is comprised of 64 single cells; six men moved on as part of a pilot beginning in 2020 and the remaining participants will similarly be chosen through a lottery system with the goal of creating a population in Little Scandinavia that mirrors the rest of SCI Chester.

“The unique combination of staff-developed training, policy updates, and physical design changes to the unit make this an important project with the potential to reshape

how we approach corrections in Pennsylvania and beyond,” said Dr. Jordan Hyatt, associate professor of Criminology and Justice Studies and director of the Center for Public Policy at Drexel University. “By reimagining what incarceration looks like and focusing on rehabilitation rather than punishment, we have the potential to reduce recidivism and improve community outcomes.”

Researchers, led by Drexel University and the University of Oslo, will continue to collaborate with the DOC to gauge the initiative’s effectiveness. Data will be collected on prison climate, staff and inmate perceptions of well-being, disciplinary actions, and more. The research project was made possible by grants from [Arnold Ventures](#) and the [Nordic Research Council for Criminology](#).

“The close connection between reform and evaluation is one of the unique features of the Little Scandinavia project,” said Dr. Synøve N. Andersen, researcher at the University of Oslo and faculty fellow at Drexel University. “The ability to follow this process from the very beginning gives the research team a rare opportunity to learn more about what happens when ideas and principles from Scandinavian corrections are implemented in another penal, social and cultural setting.

“Will these ‘penal transplants’ thrive in their new environment, or will we observe some unexpected responses and outcomes? The answers to these and related questions are relevant to all who are interested in comparative approaches to punishment and incarceration, including our partners in Scandinavia.”

“On behalf of the Norwegian Correctional Service, I’d like to congratulate our partners at SCI Chester with the opening”, said Kim Ekhaugen, Director of International Cooperation at the Norwegian Correctional Service. “We’re impressed by their perseverance and look forward to following the next phase of the project”.

“From a Swedish perspective, this has been a genuine learning experience, with an exchange of ideas, perspectives and experiences in both directions,” said Martin Gillå, head of office for International Affairs Swedish Prison and Probation Service.

“Corrections officers around the world share a complex mission and working in challenging environments, and it is through shared practices we strive to improve and give our inmates a chance to rehabilitate and reintegrate into society again.”

To learn more about the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, visit cor.pa.gov.

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