

Southwest



Washington

Central Labor Council

"A Voice For Working Families!"

P.O. Box 61929 • Vancouver, WA 98666-1928 • (360) 818-1877

Email: info@swwaclc.org

As Voted On and Approved by the Council, September 6th, 2023:

WHEREAS, Larch Corrections Center (LCC) is targeted for closure by the Department of Corrections (DOC) in October, 2023; and

WHEREAS, LCC has the capacity to provide habilitation and reentry services for up to 480 incarcerated individuals. Services provided at LCC include but are not limited to substance abuse education, cognitive behavior therapy, vocational skills and certification, housing, family centered activities; and WHEREAS, LCC provides education through a partnership with Clark College and graduates more of the incarcerated population than any other facility per capita. LCC with Clark College can educate those incarcerated up to a bachelor's degree using the Second Chance Act Pell Grants. Clark College staff at LCC are nationally recognized for their educational programs such as the first peer led tutor program to assist in successful program completion; and

WHEREAS, LCC's partnership with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) employs up to 120 incarcerated individuals to provide initial response to fire suppression, trail/ recreational activity, and other silviculture activities work force in Southwest Washington. LCC during COVID-19 (2020-2022) and at half capacity managed to respond to over 73 wildland fires, planted almost 1 million trees in Southwest Washington's forests. The work done with DNR provides those participating in this training program the opportunity to become DNR employees upon release increasing this highly understaffed workforce as agreed to in HB 1168 of the 2021/2022 legislative session; and

WHEREAS, LCC's incarcerated population provide initial response to over 40 wildland fires annually for Southwest Washington protecting countless lives, structures, homes, and forest resources that provide funding for schools and other vital infrastructure in Southwest Washington ultimately saving Washington State millions of dollars annually. Moving this response to another location puts all of this in jeopardy; and

WHEREAS, LCC provides Community Work Crews (CWC) to assist community organizations such as the Lower Columbia Fish Enhancement Group, the Humane Society, Clark County Public Works Department, Washington State Department of Transportation, Clark County Food Bank, Pomeroy Living History Farm. Crews learn valuable vocational skills that translate to meaningful in demand careers upon release; and

WHEREAS, LCC was funded by the Department of Commerce to upgrade its boiler system to a biomass gasification system that would reduce the facility's carbon footprint by 91% which is 44 tonnes annually. This system would provide invaluable vocational skills to the incarcerated population leading to living wage union jobs. This system would improve the ability for local communities in Southwest

Washington to respond to the climate change initiatives such as Governor Inslee’s Carbon Initiative outlined in HB 1181 of the 2022/2023 legislative session; and
WHEREAS, LCC provides the best patient to provider ratio in the DOC to ensure that the incarcerated population receives the necessary mental health, healthcare, and dental so that they can be successful while at LCC. Since LCC is the only male standalone minimum facility that has an established fully staffed dental care program, the facility should be the first choice in residence for the population that needs these services; LCC is located approximately 20 miles away from level 1 and 2 trauma care hospitals compared to their similar facilities that are approximately 80 miles away for this same level of care; and

WHEREAS, LCC is centrally located in the Yacolt Burn State Forest and is there for the purpose of their initial response to wildland fires in the Pacific Cascade Region. This location allows for quick response to wildland fires that historically cross the Columbia River from Oregon State. Without this resource the power grid established by Bonneville Power is vulnerable and could cause a loss of power from this region up to Tacoma. LCC is the least remote standalone male facility in the state and is 12 miles away from the 4th largest city in the state; and

WHEREAS, the estimated 31 million dollars needed for repairs over the next 10 years, LCC would still need to be completed regardless of whether the facility remains open or is put into the suggested warm closure status and the majority of this expense is for roofing repairs which have mostly been completed; and

WHEREAS, the closure of LCC would result in layoffs of staff due to the lack of DOC facilities within a reasonable travelling distance. The closure of LCC is identified as having the highest negative impact on the community and staff vs. similar facilities in the state.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Southwest Washington Central Labor Council as follows: The Southwest Washington Central Labor Council recognizes the critical role that LCC plays in rehabilitation and reentry of incarcerated individuals located at that site. Reducing carbon, finding ways to break barriers to education, and providing critical marketable skills to reduce the recidivism rate of those incarcerated so that they are more productive members of society. This Labor Council strongly urges Governor Inslee to convince the DOC to reverse their decision or pause until the Washington State Legislature can discuss alternatives to this closure in January.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Lux". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping "L" at the end.

Kevin Lux, Secretary-Treasurer, SWWACL