



## Opinion

# MY VIEW: Make prisons safe for staff, inmates

By Joel Freedman

Published: Friday, July 22, 2011 2:12 AM EDT: The Correctional Association of New York recently released a 30-page report on the Cossackie Correctional Facility.

While the CA concluded Cossackie is in some ways an above-average prison, the CA also concluded Cossackie is one of the worst prisons in regards to inmate-staff relations.

According to the report: “The written surveys confirmed the many comments we received from inmates during our tour about staff mistreatment. In addition, we receive a substantial number of letters from inmates describing their alleged mistreatment by security staff and echoing concerns raised in the surveys. Inmates believe that many staff are verbally and, at times, physically abusive and that routinely, threats and intimidation are used to control inmate behavior, followed by actual retaliation and false tickets for those the staff dislike or inmates who are raising complaints with the administration.”

The report is also based on conversations with prison administrators, security staff, officers union representatives and inmate liaison committee members, observations made by investigators during the May 2010 visits to Cossackie, and a conference call with prison administrators on May 9, 2011.

As for safety of corrections personnel, the CA places Cossackie in the top third of maximum security prisons for frequency of assault-on-staff incidents.

The report recommends “administrators examine the policy prohibiting inmates from joining their children in the children’s play area. The opportunity for fathers to interact with their children in a play environment is essential to establishing and strengthening family bonds.” The report delves into many other aspects of imprisonment at Cossackie. It can be accessed at [www.correctionalassociation.org](http://www.correctionalassociation.org).

Alan Elsner, author of “Gates of Injustice: The Crisis in America’s Prisons,” suggests “we have entered the mean season of corrections in which penal philosophy amounts to little more than devising creative strategies to make offenders suffer.” Elsner also points out New York’s corrections officers have the highest rates of divorce, heart disease, drug addiction/alcoholism and the shortest lifespans of any other state civil servant. The Cossackie report reminds us penal institutions should be safe, decent places for inmates and staff.

And, as Elsner reminds us, “We Americans cannot separate ourselves from the world of jails and prisons. Ten million people cycle through them every year. The abuses they endure, the diseases they contract, the traumas they suffer inevitably come back to haunt the rest of society.”

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