

The Correctional Association of New York

FOUNDED 1844

135 EAST 15th STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10003 • (212) 254-5700 • Fax (212) 473-2807 • www.correctionalassociation.org

Wyoming Correctional Facility

Wyoming Correctional Facility is a medium security prison for men located in Attica, New York. The prison confined 1,684 on the day we visited. The Correctional Association's visit to the facility was on May 30 and 31, 2007.

Members of the Correctional Association's Prison Visiting Committee conducted surveys about general prison conditions, both in-person and through the mail, with nearly 145 Wyoming inmates. We have based our report on findings from these surveys; conversations with the executive team, program staff and inmates; correspondence with inmates; and meetings with the staff union representatives, staff of the substance abuse treatment programs and members of the Inmate Liaison Committee and the Inmate Grievance Resolution Committee.

The Visiting Committee was impressed with several programs at Wyoming and noted some areas of concern. Many of the vocational and educational instructors we met with struck us as dedicated and energetic teachers concerned with helping inmates learn, develop skills and prepare for their return to the community; the prison has a significant number of inmates obtaining their GED; the postsecondary education program was praised by the inmates; and the general library appears to be a vibrant space with dedicated staff and resources for the entire population. We were concerned, however, about: inmates' reports of substantial tension among inmates and staff, as well as a high level of violence in the prison; treatment of inmates in the Special Housing Unit; crowding in the visiting room; and inmate problems with medical services.

Wyoming was built in the 1980s in the "cookie cutter" model at a time when many medium security facilities were constructed throughout the state with similar architecture and layout. Over the years, its capacity has significantly expanded to its current level of 1,712. In addition to a variety of treatment, vocational and educational programs, the prison has a dairy farm and a large recycling program

Similar to prison populations throughout the state, 23% of Wyoming's 1684 inmates are white, 53% are African-American and 23% are Latino. The median age of the population is 35 and 75% are from New York City and its surrounding suburbs. Like at other medium security prisons, most inmates face the possibility of release within two years, and all the inmates will reach their earliest possible release date within six years. Forty-seven percent of the population were convicted of a violent crime and 30% have a drug conviction. Similar to the statewide

average, 54% of the prisoners have their high school diploma or GED and 7% are Spanish-speakers with limited or no ability to speak English. Seventy-seven percent of Wyoming's population has been identified as having a substance abuse history by the Department of Correctional Services (DOCS), a figure slightly higher than the system-wide rate of 72%.

Inmates filed a total of 421 grievances in 2006, representing little change from the 2005 number of 415. The most highly grieved area in 2006 was medical, with 93 grievances, up substantially from 42 grievances the previous year. Staff misconduct also showed a marked increase in the number of grievances with 79, up from 51 in 2005.

The following is a summary of our observations and recommendations.

Programs

Wyoming has extensive programmatic offerings for inmates, and according to data we received from the facility, under 2% of the inmates are idle, or without a program or job assignment. A total of 1,356 inmates are in programs or jobs for the whole day, and an additional 294 are occupied for half the day.

However, 808 inmates have porter assignments, which entail cleaning or basic maintenance around the prison and rarely involve the development of useful skills. Although a few porters told us they are pleased with their assignment, many inmates described porter positions as monotonous, low-paying assignments that are virtually useless in preparing people for return to the community.

Consistent with prisons throughout the state, inmates earn between 10 and 45 cents an hour for their paid modules. This rate of pay has remained unchanged for approximately 20 years, although the cost of items in the commissary has increased with inflation, and commissary prices are comparable to charges for goods purchased outside of prison. Prisoners at Wyoming and throughout the state consistently complain about their growing inability to afford commissary goods.

Vocational Program

A total of 491 Wyoming inmates are enrolled in one of ten vocational programs, which include Air Conditioning, Building Maintenance, Custodial Maintenance, Computer Repair, Drafting, Electrical Trades, Floor Covering, Upholstery, Welding and Horticulture.

Many inmates spoke highly of the vocational offerings. Seventy-one percent of inmates we surveyed reported that they were satisfied with their vocational program, at least sometimes or somewhat. Inmates' limited complaints about the vocational program concerned the difficulty they experienced in changing vocational courses or enrolling in a second vocational course after completing one, as well as outdated classroom materials. Some inmates also expressed concerns that the skills they acquired at the prison would not be useful in the community after release. However, several inmates praised both the content and instruction in the Horticulture and Upholstery programs. While there were Spanish-speaking Inmate Program Associates (IPAs) in

two of the vocational programs we observed, inmates in other programs expressed the need for additional Spanish-language materials and assistance. In addition, our observations corresponded with inmates' reports of out-of-date computers in the Computer Repair program.

Overall, the instructors appeared to be engaged, creative and committed to their students. Several instructors showed dedication that extended beyond the classroom: the Small Engines instructor had donated personal materials to the class, the Upholstery instructor collected recycled furniture for his students and the Horticulture instructor reported finding class project ideas in the local community. Many instructors expressed personal pride in their students' accomplishments. Some teachers said they assist inmates with job preparedness through activities such as mock interviews and computer skills instruction. One instructor said that he works one-on-one with students to develop employment skills based on their individual interests and needs. Instructors mentioned that the inmates would benefit from additional trainers and more up-to-date technological materials.

Upon successful completion of a vocational program, inmates receive a DOCS certificate recognizing their achievement. The prison also offers two Department of Labor (DOL) apprenticeships, which enable inmates to gain certification in a field that is recognized in the community, although no Wyoming inmates have achieved certification since 2005. More inmates should be encouraged to work towards DOL certification, as it helps to ensure employability and success upon release from prison and can motivate other inmates. Finally, we were pleased to note that inmates will soon be able to work towards certification from the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) in some vocational programs, a lengthy and challenging process that is recognized nationally outside of prison.

Academic Program

Wyoming's educational courses include Adult Basic Education (ABE), Pre-General Equivalency Diploma (Pre-GED), GED and Special Education for certain inmates under the age of 21 who do not possess a high school diploma. Additionally, Wyoming offers English as a Second Language (ESL), as well as Spanish ABE and Spanish GED programs. Wyoming has three bilingual education staff members, the highest of any New York State prison according to the DOCS Educational Annual Report, and is also one of the few state prisons that offers a post-secondary college program, which is funded primarily by a local consortium of three colleges. There were no vacancies on Wyoming's educational staff of 16 instructors, but one instructor was on temporary medical leave. Five hundred fifty-one inmates were enrolled in a non-college academic program, and all programs, while not at capacity, were nearly full. While cell study in English or Spanish is available for inmates in the Special Housing Unit or on keeplock, none were enrolled in an educational cell-study program.

We toured several classrooms, including the computer lab, where students have weekly classes, and found the environment to be bright and engaging. One teacher noted that the computers are five years old, and the students would benefit from updated technology and additional office-based computer skills training. Inmate comments about the educational program and staff were very positive overall. Sixty-six percent of inmates surveyed said they were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the educational program at Wyoming, while 34%

indicated they were not satisfied with the program. The main concerns about the educational program related to extensive waiting lists and insufficient space in the classrooms. Some inmates noted that there are not enough teachers, requiring inmates in some instances to assist their peers rather than receiving direct instruction from a professional.

GED passage rates at Wyoming were impressive. In 2005, 80 inmates (80% of test-takers) received their GED, and in 2006, 77 inmates or 71% of test-takers passed the exam. When asked why the GED pass rates were so high at Wyoming, the acting Deputy Superintendent of Programs responded that the educational staff is stable and well-qualified, the facility encourages inmates to succeed as it will help their chances after release, there are big graduation ceremonies as incentive and many inmates want to participate in activities, such as sign language training, which require a GED.

Postsecondary Education

Inmates who have completed a high-school level curriculum may qualify for the college program run by the Consortium of the Niagara Frontier and work to earn their Bachelor's or Associate's degree in general liberal studies. Unlike most prisons, which had to end their post-secondary programs due to cuts in state and federal funding during the 1990s, Wyoming maintains a small, but highly-regarded college program. The Consortium, which consists of three local colleges, supports and staffs the program. The professor with whom we met commented that Assemblymember Jeffrion Aubry and Senator Dale Volker have been very supportive of the program.

We were pleased to learn that for the first time in many years, the program received financial support from DOCS, which was used to purchase books and additional computers for the students. The college staff is currently two professors, and the program had 87 enrolled students. In 2006, seven students earned their Associate's degrees and two earned their Bachelor's. When we visited, two students had already achieved their Associate's degree that year and one had earned a Bachelor's degree. College students also run study groups and offer peer tutoring and mentoring services. They may also participate in weekly yoga classes. Inmates in the college program were very satisfied and praised it as a well-run program and the highlight of their day.

At its height, the college program had 15 professors covering three locations, a developmental pre-college program, four classrooms and a college dorm. The program is now run in two small, crowded classrooms with limited staff and funding. Given that 54% of the inmates at the prison have achieved their GED or high school diploma, we encourage the expansion of the capacity, space and resources of the program. We spoke with many inmates throughout the day who told us they were eager to attend college, but were discouraged by its limited capacity. There are more than 100 inmates currently on a waiting list to enroll. We encourage the prison to work with DOCS Central Office personnel to place inmates working towards their degrees in the college program on an administrative hold at the prison so that they will not be transferred to another prison until they have completed their education.

Industry

There were 219 inmates participating in the industry program at the prison; 162 were involved in industrial food services and 57 were employed in pre-industrial training. In the food service job, inmates with a GED earn \$20 every two weeks, a \$4 weekly premium over that given to inmate workers without their GED. Inmates can earn even more with experience or if they obtain a certification in their job. The inmate population noted, however, that there are very few openings in industry and not all inmates can qualify for these jobs.

Libraries

General Library

Members of the Visiting Committee inspected the library and spoke with the head librarian. The Wyoming library provided a crowded but welcoming environment with well-displayed books lining the shelves and decorations covering the walls. There is one full-time librarian and one part-time assistant librarian at the prison. There are also five IPAs who work in the library, as well as inmate volunteers.

In addition to a large Black Studies section along the popular reading wall, we were pleased to note spaces dedicated to self-help books and Spanish-language literature. While some inmates complained about the lack of Spanish language novels, the librarian informed us that an order had been placed for additional Spanish books, which we hope will alleviate the problem.

The library participates in an interlibrary loan (ILL) system and receives anywhere from 10 to 30 books per week from cooperating libraries. There are two print enlargers to assist prisoners with visual impairments and an extensive collection of books on tape. IPAs are authorized to use the computerized catalog system for the prison collection, and anyone can use the computerized catalog for ILL books.

The librarian told us that Wyoming's "population is very into the library and very protective of it." Of the inmates we surveyed, 74% were satisfied with the general library at least some of the time and inmates confirmed that they can usually access the reading material they want. The librarian told us that checked-out books are generally returned and individuals bring back books when they find them in the general population. We were pleased to note that most of the collection resides on stacks that are accessible to inmates visiting the library for browsing. We did not hear about problems with access to the general library and the librarian said inmates may come to library up to a couple of times per week.

The librarian seemed dedicated and proud of his work. In addition to staffing the library, he teaches a health class for 15 inmates in the evening. While it is not required by prison regulations, the librarian makes weekly rounds to the SHU to update the book cart and fill individual requests.

With an extensive and expanding collection, the library would benefit from more space for stacks. Additional computers with updated software would also be beneficial.

Law Library

Members of the Visiting Committee also visited the law library and spoke with the law librarian. In contrast to the general library, there were several problems identified by Committee members. There is insufficient space for all the resources; many volumes are out-of-date or missing altogether; some of the most frequently cited cases were torn out of books; and several editions of the self-help literature guide were out-of-date.

There are five typewriters in the library, all of which were in use, and no computers. During our visit, we suggested to the Deputy Superintendent for Administration that computers with Westlaw on CD-ROM would be highly useful to inmates. The ability to save frequently-used documents on hard drives or removable memory would make the law clerks' work more efficient. Access to high quality, up-to-date legal materials is often of crucial importance for inmates.

About half the inmates we surveyed were unsatisfied with the law library, and about half were satisfied, at least some of the time. While the library is open from 3:30 to 6:30pm, seven days a week, some inmates expressed frustration about access. Inmates affirmed that they can generally access the law library when they have a pending court deadline. However, several inmates reported multiple-week and even month long waits for routine law library call-outs.

Medical Care

During our visit we met with the Facility Health Services Director (FHSD) and the Nurse Administrator and toured the medical and dental areas. We appreciate the medical staff's comprehensive responses to our questions and their cooperation during the visit. They did not express any major concerns about their healthcare system and seemed confident that they could meet the inmates' medical needs.

In contrast to the staff presentation, however, the inmates' expressed significant concerns about medical care. Medical care is the most frequently grieved issue at the prison, and the number of grievances about healthcare more than doubled in 2006 to 93 from 42 in 2005. Our inmate surveys confirm the prison population's concerns. Fifty-five percent of the survey participants rated medical care as poor, 37% considered it fair and only 6% reported it as good.

The medical staffing at Wyoming has remained stable with two full time equivalent physicians, 11 nurses and a Nurse Administrator. The prison apparently has an extra service item for eight hours per week for a Physician Assistant (PA), and PA Thomas Edwards from Attica C.F. has sometimes been used for this position. At the time of our visit, there were two nurse vacancies that had occurred a few weeks earlier, and the prison anticipated filling these positions promptly. We were informed that many nursing positions have turned over in the past few years, usually because of retirement or promotion, and that the prison has experienced periodic difficulties in replacing nursing staff, though not recently. It does not appear that the prison needs more nursing staff when it has its full complement of nurses. We were also told that the medical department is authorized to employ a full-time per diem nurse, but does not completely utilize this position and does not require extensive overtime for its existing staff.

Sick call is conducted five days per week with between two and four nurses. The East Side of the prison is called first at 6:00 am, and a maximum of 20 inmates can be called at one time to the sick call area. For inmates on the East Side who are ill, they must walk a very long distance to get to sick call, and no provisions are made to transport them to the sick call area except in emergencies. The West Side is brought to sick call after the East Side is completed. Approximately 30-40 patients attend sick call each day. If more than 20 inmates sign up for sick call from a side of the prison, they must be called after the 7:00 am count.

The inmate population had a mixed view of the sick call process. Access generally does not appear to be a major problem, in that 54% of the survey participants stated that they could get to sick call when they needed it, 26% reported that they have such access sometimes, and only 19% responded that they could not get access when needed. However, the inmates were critical of the quality of the care they received at sick call, with 50% rating sick call as poor, 45% assessing it as fair and only 6% reporting it as good. In added comments on their surveys, inmates reported that some sick call nurses are disrespectful and non-responsive to the patients' needs. The inmates' greatest concern was that the sick call nurses do not promptly refer inmates with serious medical problems to the physicians for treatment, but rather unsuccessfully attempt to treat their conditions with over-the-counter medication such as ibuprofen.

Medical staff reported that call-outs to the clinic are conducted five days per week in the morning from 8:30 am to approximately 12:30-1:00 pm. The staff estimated that it takes inmates two to three weeks to see a physician for routine matters, which represent the majority of inmate appointments, but they admitted that the waiting period for routine appointments can sometimes expand to five or six weeks. For more serious conditions, representing approximately 20-30% of the total number of clinic call-outs, patients are seen within one week. The few emergencies are seen the same day. Approximately 140-150 inmates are seen each week at the clinic.

Thirty-one percent of the survey participants reported that they frequently experience delays in access to the doctors, 32% stated that such delays occur once in a while and 28% replied that they never experience delays. The inmates' estimates of the time it takes to see a physician were relatively consistent with that reported by the staff, except that in some cases the inmates reported delays of several months.

Even more problematic, however, is the inmates' assessment of the quality of the care they received from the doctors once they are seen. Forty-nine percent rated physician care as poor, 43% assessed the care as fair and only 9% considered the care good. In reviewing inmates' comments in their surveys, although some participants commented positively about some providers, particularly the PA, many more participants reported that many providers were not receptive to inmates' concerns and did not properly respond to their medical conditions.

The facility reported that there were 34 Wyoming inmates identified as HIV-positive of which 26 were on treatment. This number appears low, given the rate of HIV infection in the male state prison population, estimated to be approximately 6.7%, and would indicate approximately 113 inmates at Wyoming are HIV-infected. If Wyoming has a similar HIV infection rate to the rest of the state system, Wyoming has identified only one-third of its HIV-

positive population. Moreover, of the 15 inmates who are co-infected with HIV and Hepatitis C (HCV), none were receiving HCV treatment. The FHSD could not recollect ever providing HCV therapy to any co-infected inmate. We urge the medical staff to reassess the co-infected population to determine if any patients could benefit from HCV therapy. We were pleased to learn that the DOCS quality assurance program for HIV care, HIVQUAL, is being conducted regularly at the prison, and the FHSD reported that no significant deficiencies have been identified in these assessments. We hope that the prison can make greater efforts to identify more HIV-infected inmates so that a larger percentage of the HIV prison population can begin appropriate care.

The prison also reported that there were 114 inmates identified as infected with HCV and seven were currently on therapy. It appears that the prison is doing a better job at screening for HCV. The 114 HCV-infected Wyoming inmates represent more than 50% of the estimated total population of HCV inmates at the prison, based upon current prevalence rates of the illness in DOCS (10.4% – 13.3% for male prisoners). The medical staff informed us that they are not experiencing any difficulties getting liver biopsies performed and stated that this procedure can generally be scheduled within four weeks. We were pleased to learn that the prison has provided HCV treatment to inmates who have less than a year on their sentence, and the prison was able to coordinate with community-based providers to continue HCV therapy upon the inmate's release. The FHSD also reported that they have had a significant number of HCV-infected inmates who have favorably responded to the HCV therapy and that most patients have completed the full 12-month treatment protocol. He said some patients have remained free of the virus for six months following the treatment, thereby meeting the requirement of a sustained virological response which is considered successful treatment. We did not receive any specific complaints from the inmate population about HCV care.

There is no Spanish-speaking medical staff, and bilingual inmates translate for inmates with limited English skills. The prison apparently does not use the telephone translation service for medical encounters, although we were informed that such translation services are used for other prison functions. We urge the medical staff to investigate the use of telephonic translation for medical encounters with patients with limited English skills.

The medical staff reported that routine specialty appointments can usually be secured in three to six weeks, including clinics for surgery, orthopedics, physical therapy and gastroenterology that are held at Attica and to which Wyoming inmates are transported. Although the prison quality assurance program has never evaluated whether the medical staff are appropriately following up on specialist recommendations, the FHSD reported that such follow-up is not a problem and that the prison has timely access to specialty services.

In contrast to the medical staff's assessments, inmates were more critical of the specialty care services. Sixty-five percent of the survey respondents who had received specialty services stated that they had experienced delays in seeing a specialist and estimated that these delays were 60-90 days. Of greater concern was the participants' assessment of the prison's response to the specialists' recommendations; 72% of the survey participants reported that the medical staff's follow-up to a specialty consultation was not good.

Wyoming obtains its medication from the Attica pharmacy, although in early 2007 it received medications through an outside pharmacy vender. It has not had its own pharmacy operation for approximately ten years. We are concerned that Wyoming providers currently do not have access to the pharmacy records of their patients, but we were informed that the new DOCS computerized pharmacy system will soon be operational at the prison. We urge providers to use this new system to monitor their patients' progress with chronic conditions who are receiving long-term medications, and to initiate quality assurance activities using computer records from the pharmacy system. Of the 76 inmates who were taking medications and responded to our survey, approximately two-thirds reported that they experienced problems with their medications at least some of the time. We did not receive sufficient details to determine whether these difficulties were related to access to medications or the patients' satisfaction with their treatment. We recommend the medical department speak with the ILC to determine the nature of inmates' problems with their medications.

We were informed that the prison has a quality assurance (QA) committee that meets on a quarterly basis. The committee has done some medical chart reviews, and we were told the committee prepares reports of its meeting, which are provided to the Superintendent and Regional Medical Director. The FHSD could not recollect any recent contact with Division of Health Services' (DHS) central office quality assurance committee. We did not review records of the prison QA committee, and therefore, cannot comment on its work product. However, we urge DHS personnel to regularly review its activities and provide guidance for future QA studies.

Dental Services

We toured the dental area and spoke with one of the dentists assigned to the prison. Although the prison is authorized to employ two dentists, it has been missing a half-time dentist for more than two years, placing great strain on the dental department and resulting in delays in service. Several inmates complained to us about delays in dental services, and the dental staff admitted that it can take two months to schedule non-emergency care. The dental facilities appeared new and in excellent condition, but some equipment is seldom used due to staff shortages. Since the dentist vacancy has persisted for over two years, central office staff must intervene to assist the prison in identifying an appropriate candidate for the position; and if compensation limits are the problem, state officials outside of DOCS must make efforts to raise the civil service rate for this position.

Mental Health Services

Wyoming is an Office of Mental Health (OMH) level four prison, meaning that the facility has limited mental health services, with only part time mental health staff coming to the prison from Attica. We did not interview any mental health staff during our visit and heard few comments from the inmates about the services. The prison reported that only 11 inmates were on the mental health caseload and no inmates from the prison were admitted to Central New York Psychiatric Hospital or a Residential Crisis Treatment Program in the last few years. From our surveys, we identified only one inmate currently on the OMH caseload and only six inmates who ever received mental health services while at the prison. Although it represents a limited sample, a majority of these patients rated mental health care as poor. The other survey

respondents who had not received mental health care at the prison also expressed a negative view of the mental health services. We urge the mental health staff to meet with the ILC to explore the reasons for the inmates' critical assessment of the mental health program.

Safety and Violence

Inmate-Staff Relations

Inmates described relations with some, but not all, of Wyoming's staff as tense and sometimes abusive. Throughout the prison, inmates told us that some civilian and security staff treat them disrespectfully. Eighty-two percent of respondents described inmate-officer relations as bad and only 5% said relations were good. Similarly, 73% of respondents reported that inmate-officer relations are worse at Wyoming than at other prisons where they have been confined. Some inmates described the tension that arises when correction officers in their twenties address inmates many years their senior with condescension. Many told us that the 3:00pm to 11:00pm shift is when most of the problems occur, and Building 14 and the SHU were cited by a significant number of inmates as the location of many conflicts between inmates and staff.

An analysis of DOCS Unusual Incident Reports (UIR) for the period January 2003 through August 2006, reveals that Wyoming's rate for incidents of assaults on staff was in the top third of all medium security prisons in the state, confirming the inmates' perception that there is a significant number of inmate-staff confrontations. Similarly, a review of state-wide inmate discipline records for the frequency of misbehavior reports for assaults on staff confirms that Wyoming ranks in the top half of all medium security prisons. Although it appears that there have not been a significant number of incidents resulting in serious injuries to inmates or staff, the frequency of such confrontations remains unacceptably high.

In contrast to these data, the staff described relations between staff and inmates as "excellent" and "wide open." A staff member told us that inmates are not afraid to approach staff, particularly because they have confidence that they will be dealt with fairly. The staff attributed the positive interactions to the lengthy experience level of the staff who, they reported, have the skills to work effectively with the prison population.

Confirming some of the positive impressions of the staff about inmate-staff relations, many prisoners were eager to note that some staff are professional and respectful. When asked whether they believe there are COs at the prison who do a particularly good job, 94% responded affirmatively, while 82 % said there are COs who engage in misconduct. However, when the survey respondents were asked to quantify the percentage of security staff who participate in serious misconduct, the median score was 60%; the participants also estimated that 30% of the COs do a good job. With much consistency, inmates told us there are some COs and civilians who are largely responsible for mistreating inmates and inmates did not place the blame on the entire staff. As one inmate put it, "it's not all the COs; everybody doesn't come here to make everyone's day bad."

A majority of the survey participants described some problem with the staff. The most common inmate complaint concerned verbal harassment by staff. Of the inmates we surveyed, 59% reported that they are verbally harassed frequently, and an additional 22% said they face verbal harassment once in a while. When we asked how often verbal harassment occurs throughout the prison, 90% reported it as frequent and only 2% said it never occurs. Overall, 77% of participants stated that staff mistreatment at Wyoming was much or somewhat worse than at other prisons in which they have been confined.

Many inmates are also concerned about physically abusive practices at the prison, whether or not they have personally experienced a problem. For example, twenty-five percent of the inmates we surveyed reported experiencing a physical confrontation with staff at Wyoming, and overall, 62% said such problems are frequent throughout the prison. Similarly, 20% reported experiencing an abusive pat frisk, and 67% said the practice is common. Some inmates reported that the physical confrontations with staff typically involve “young kids being thrown against the wall” or being punched or kicked upon admission to the SHU. More than two-thirds of the survey participants stated that inmate-staff physical confrontations were worse at Wyoming than at other prisons in which they have been confined. Engendering increased sensitivity and improved communication among staff and inmates may reduce some anxiety in the population about abusive practices.

Many inmates assert that racism contributes to the problems among inmates and staff. There are only 13 people of color among the prison’s 380 correction officers, whereas 76% of the prison’s population is African-American or Latino. Fifty-seven percent of the inmates described racism by staff as widespread or fairly common and only 2% said it does not exist at all. Forty-eight percent said racial discrimination contributes substantially to abuse problems at Wyoming, and only 2% said it does not contribute at all to abuse. Some inmates told us that rather than being overt, racism is an unspoken cause of disrespectful behavior by staff. Introducing additional training for staff to gain sensitivity for the different backgrounds of the inmates may reduce the number of the confrontations caused by racial tension between the prison population and the security staff.

Inmate-Inmate Relations

Although the staff described relations among inmates as calm, with one asserting that he could not imagine the level of violence being lower anywhere, many inmates reported a high level of inmate-on-inmate conflicts. While personal disagreements and stress were cited as common reasons for problems among the population, survey respondents identified gangs as a significant source of the conflicts more than any other cause.

In 2006, there were 27 Unusual Incident Reports (UIRs) regarding an inmate assault on another inmate and in 2005 there were 33, a rate that is substantially higher than at other medium security prisons throughout the state. An analysis of computerized records of UIRs of inmate-on-inmate assaults for the period January 2003 through August 2006 reveals that Wyoming had the second highest rate for these UIRs of all medium security prisons, two to five times the rate of most other medium security prisons. We heard about inmate-on-inmate confrontations particularly during our visits to the housing areas on the East Side of the prison. Wyoming ranks

in the top 40% of medium security prison in the rate of disciplinary reports for inmate assaults on other inmates. We recommend that the prison executive team meet with the ILC to explore why this rate is so high and what measures could be implemented to reduce it.

Nearly one-third of the survey participants reported being in a physical confrontation at least once at Wyoming, and 97% reported that such confrontations occur frequently or once in a while. Half the population stated that there is more physical violence among inmates at Wyoming than at other prisons, and only 14% said there is less.

The staff told us the Department and the prison have done an effective job of substantially reducing gang activity at the prison, although they acknowledged that gangs will always exist at some level. Inmates, however, consistently reported significant gang activity at Wyoming, with 69% describing it as very common, 22% reporting it as somewhat common and just 9% saying it is rare. Over half the inmates said there is more gang activity at Wyoming than at other prisons, and 91% reported that gangs are a significant source of violence at the prison.

Drug use by inmates also appears prevalent, with 44% of the survey participants describing it as very or somewhat common, yet fewer inmates described it as a source of problems in the population than they did gangs. Fifty-two percent said that drug use does not contribute at all or only very little to violence at Wyoming, whereas 22% said drug trafficking contributed a lot to prison violence and 26% reported that it contributed somewhat to violence.

Cameras

Wyoming has cameras monitoring the inmate bathrooms in the visiting areas and in the mess hall and the vocational area. There are none in the SHU or Building 14, although they are the areas of the prison where inmates report that they are most concerned for their safety. Many inmates believe cameras would make the prison safer, with 65% reporting that they would help prevent abuse. Cameras in prisons protect staff and inmates and ensure that the appropriate individuals are held accountable when disturbances occur.

Perception of Safety

Many Wyoming inmates fear for their well-being. Fifty-eight percent said they frequently feel unsafe at Wyoming and an additional 23% reported feeling unsafe once in a while. When we asked the inmates who said they sometimes or frequently feel unsafe to describe how unsafe they feel, 52% said they feel very unsafe, 32% said they feel somewhat unsafe and 16% said they feel only a little unsafe. Whether their concerns relate to relations with staff or inmates, there appears to be a substantial amount of anxiety and fear among Wyoming's population.

Grievance Program

Of the inmates we surveyed, 78% rated the effectiveness of the grievance system as poor, with 70% of the respondents describing it as worse at Wyoming than at other facilities. Only five percent thought the program was better at Wyoming than elsewhere. Sixty-four percent of

the survey participants reported experiencing at least one incident of retaliation for filing a grievance, while 36% said they have never experienced retaliation.

Special Housing Unit

Wyoming's Special Housing Unit (SHU) has capacity for 32 inmates. When we visited, there were 29 inmates confined on the unit and we received surveys from 11 residents.

Although the medical staff makes regular rounds on the unit, approximately half of the SHU survey participants rated the sick call nurses, physicians and overall medical care as poor. Most survey participants reported that mental health staff also comes to the unit weekly and expressed a somewhat more favorable opinion of the mental health services provided. Although some SHU inmates complained about their access to reading material, many were pleased with their access to the general library. As noted earlier, we commend the librarian for regularly updating the books on the SHU library cart and for responding to SHU inmates' requests for specific books and periodicals.

Unfortunately, no SHU inmate was involved in an educational cell study program at the time of our visit. The opportunity to engage in an educational activity while in 23-hour segregation can help to reduce future misbehavior and enables inmates to use their time productively.

Although none of the inmates were on deprivation orders, most complained about periodic denials of recreation, meals and showers in the SHU, services that are required to be offered to SHU inmates pursuant to DOCS regulations and state law. Throughout the prison, inmates told us that the SHU staff verbally harassed inmates, and some described SHU inmates being physically abused when they are admitted to the unit. Most SHU survey participants reported that they never or infrequently go to recreation, and some reported that they did not believe inmates in Wyoming's SHU were entitled to the one-hour of out-of-cell time per day mandated by state law. We urge the prison administration to investigate this situation to determine whether SHU inmates are being denied or discouraged from seeking mandated services.

Visiting Program

The visiting program at Wyoming operates on weekends and holidays, and we were told that inmates are guaranteed at least one hour per visit. In addition to the visiting room, the facility was utilizing a temporary overflow room with the same capacity as the established visiting room, along with an outdoor area to accommodate an even higher number of visits when the weather permits. More than two-thirds of the survey respondents reported dissatisfaction with the visiting program. Inmates throughout the prison complained consistently that visits are terminated too often due to a lack of space. Additionally, some complained that due to lengthy processing times and insufficient capacity, some visitors are turned away without seeing their loved ones. Finally, we heard reports that the prison terminates visits with several inmates all at the same time and before fully processing new visitors for these vacant spaces, leaving multiple tables unnecessarily empty for more than an hour.

The executive team informed us of planned renovations that will double the size of the visiting room, incorporating the area that is presently used for outdoor visits and eliminating the outdoor space. Once completed, the temporary overflow room will no longer be used for visits and the outdoor visiting area will no longer exist. The result will be less overall space for visits, with the same capacity for indoor visits and no area for outdoor visits. Staff and inmates expressed concerns that the renovations would not address the need for additional space. Helping inmates to maintain connections to loved ones outside of prison is a critical component of ensuring a stable prison environment and preparing inmates for a successful return to their communities. Since the existing capacity is insufficient, we recommend that after the renovation is completed the facility consider continuing the use of the overflow room when the demand for visiting space exceeds the new area, and that the prison develop plans for additional outdoor space to facilitate greater capacity of the visiting program during good weather.

Package Program

Inmates throughout the prison expressed frustration with the way packages are handled. Eighty-three percent of respondents stated that they are dissatisfied with the package room. While inmates throughout the Department often voice concerns about the package room, this level of discontent is higher than at many other prisons we have visited. A number of inmates described unnecessarily long delays in receiving packages, often causing food items to spoil. We also heard of items arriving destroyed, possibly due to a lack of care in handling, and many inmates suspect staff of consuming their food or stealing their property. Finally, some inmates complained that they were not permitted to receive items they believed to be allowed under the current DOCS directive.

Staff and inmates attribute part of the problem to understaffing in the package room. One correction officer works in the package room each shift, and we were informed that additional officers are placed there during the busy holiday seasons. Increasing the regular package room staff would help to alleviate the problems in the area and reduce the related frustration in the inmate population.

Showers and Food

We received numerous complaints about the showers. The facility has initiated a construction project in some housing areas to install timers that would limit an inmate's shower time to six minutes. Inmates asserted that because of these devices and problems with the regulation of the hot water, they had insufficient time to shower. We discussed this issue with the executive team and were informed that there is a plan to install shower timers throughout the prison. The prison administration admitted that they have experienced problems in providing an adequate quantity of hot water and consequently, have halted the installation of the timers until that problem is fixed. The executive team believes, however, that the inmate population will eventually adjust to the limitation on shower time once the hot water problem is solved.

We also heard numerous complaints about the rice that was recently added to the inmates' menu. It appears that DOCS' central food production center has changed the rice that is

being provided to the prison. Given that this problem had just come to the attention of the prison officials, they agreed to investigate the situation to determine whether any corrective action is necessary.

Meeting with Staff

Visiting Committee members met with representatives of each staff union, and we appreciated the informative conversation. They described a pleasant work environment in which they generally feel safe and where there is a good rapport among security and civilian staff. They also noted that they have generally positive relations with the administration and appreciated the open-door policy of the executive team.

Wyoming's security staff are very experienced, which, they reported, helps to maintain safety in the prison. There is concern among some staff that many senior correction officers would retire upon reaching 25 years with the Department, since their existing pension plan offers no incentive for them to remain on the job longer. One staff member estimated that approximately two-thirds of the COs would reach 25 years on the job within seven years, and he asserted many are likely to retire rather than stay on the job. Staff is worried that the stabilizing influence of experienced COs will be lost and the inexperienced staff will no longer have the advantage of learning from seasoned officers.

Although they stressed that the facility is a safe and secure work environment, the staff pointed out some areas with insufficient security coverage. Officer posts in the storehouse, the maintenance area, the commissary, the state shop and the laundry were eliminated years ago, and the night shift has limited coverage. In addition, security staff are often stretched in providing supervision of regular duties like snow removal and sick call because of routinely limited staffing. Finally, they expressed concerns that the maintenance staff do not have enough radios to ensure security when they are in areas with no coverage by correction officers.

While not disputing the disciplinary outcomes, they described the process of determining whether staff should be disciplined as excessively long. Individuals charged with misbehavior often wait for many months to learn the outcome of an investigation, jeopardizing their professional status and producing anxiety and frustration.

Other concerns raised by staff include the limited space in their locker room, which does not have a separate area for women; delays in obtaining medical clearance from the Department to return to work after being out on workers' compensation; an inadequate employee wellness program and limited facilities for staff to remain fit and healthy; and outdated computers assigned to some civilian posts, making it difficult for these employees to perform their job in the most efficient manner.

Final Meeting with Executive Team

At the end of our visit, the Visiting Committee met with Superintendent Giamb Bruno and the executive team to discuss our initial observations. We mentioned our positive impressions

of the facility's vocational and academic programs, including the college program. We also noted that we were impressed with the library and the efforts of the librarian.

We discussed our concern that the plan to expand the visiting room will not alleviate the problems in the area and also noted that we heard reports of unnecessary delays in processing visitors. We informed Superintendent Giambruno and his executive team about the many complaints concerning the package room, and we were encouraged to hear that they have requested an increase in staff to address the problems. We told them of the outdated and missing materials in the law library, and they informed us that they would contact Central Office to address the issue.

Regarding inmates' concerns that inmates on the East Side who attend sick call are required to awake very early and walk the long distance to the medical unit, Superintendent Giambruno told us that any inmate who is too sick to walk the distance to the medical unit is transferred to the prison's West Side.

The Superintendent told us that the prison's close proximity to Buffalo enables the hiring of a diverse staff and noted that more diversity, including more female staff members, helps to create an environment that he said benefits all inmates. He also told us that the constructive relationship between the security and program staff is particularly crucial since there are so many programs at Wyoming.

Recommendations

Programs – General

- Increase the wages for inmates' paid modules.

Vocational Program

- Consult with instructors and inmates to identify and obtain training and technological materials in Spanish.
- Hire Spanish-speaking staff or ensure that a bilingual IPA is assigned to each class.
- Obtain up-to-date computers for the computer repair program.
- Increase the number of inmates working towards their Department of Labor certificates.
- Permit inmates who have met all their program requirements to participate in an additional vocational program.

Academic Program

- Update the computers and software in the lab used by students in the academic program.

Postsecondary Education

- Increase DOCS' financial support for the college program.

- Ensure that people working towards their degrees are not transferred out of the prison until they have achieved their degrees except when necessary for disciplinary or health reasons.
- Expand the capacity of the program and increase the classroom space available to participants.
- Institute DOCS funded, in-prison, Associates and Bachelors programs throughout the Department.

General Library

- Increase the space available in the library for materials and inmate use.
- Install additional computers and update the software on existing machines.

Law Library

- Install computers for each of the law library clerks.
- Consult with Central Office personnel and law library staff to ensure that the legal resources are up-to-date and intact.
- Obtain Westlaw on CD Rom.

Medical Care

- Initiate a meeting among the Superintendent, medical administrators and ILC to discuss the problems with medical care and review the medical grievances during the last six months to assess patterns of complaints about healthcare at the prison.
- Hire bilingual medical staff and implement the use of telephonic translation services for medical encounters with inmates with limited English skills.
- Review the quality of the sick call encounters to determine whether all sick call nurses are adequately addressing the inmates' medical needs.
- Make provisions to transport inmates from the East Side of the prison to sick call when they experience significant problems walking to the medical area.
- Reduce the time it takes for inmates to be seen by prison providers and institute a review of the quality of these medical encounters.
- Increase HIV educational efforts, including peer education, to encourage inmates to be tested for HIV and for those who are HIV-infected to seek HIV care from the medical staff.

- Initiate a review of the care provided to inmates who are co-infected with HIV and Hepatitis C (HCV) to determine whether some inmates should be considered for HCV treatment.
- Expedite efforts to get the new pharmacy computer system operational at the prison and use the system to monitor the provision of medications to inmates with chronic conditions.
- Improve the timeliness of specialty care appointments and initiate a review of completed consultations to determine whether there has been adequate follow-up to the recommendations made by the specialists.

Dental Care

- Renew efforts to hire a part-time dentist. If these efforts are not successful in the near future, seek assistance from DOCS Central Office to identify appropriate candidates and/or to contact other state officials requesting that the salary for this position be increased to enable the prison to hire a qualified dentist.
- Refer inmates who have been waiting an extended period for dental services to another prison and/or to an outside provider to obtain dental care.

Visiting Room

- Increase the permanent capacity for visits by expanding the capacity of the planned renovations to the existing visiting room and by identifying other outdoor areas that could be used during good weather.
- Alter the process for terminating a visit so that a visitor is asked to leave only when there is another inmate and new visitor already processed who can promptly occupy the vacated table.

Packages

- Increase the staff regularly assigned to the package area.
- Initiate monitoring measures to prevent delays in the delivery of packages and to reduce the destruction or loss of items contained in the packages.

Safety and Violence

- Institute a training program for staff to increase sensitivity, with an emphasis on working effectively with people of color and people from urban communities.
- Institute efforts to increase the diversity of Wyoming's staff by recruiting and hiring Spanish-speaking and African-American correction officers and additional female correction officers.
- Install additional cameras that record activities in areas where conflicts are most common, and ensure that they are consistently turned on and utilized.

- Conduct a meeting between the ILC, IGRC and relevant representatives of the administration and staff to discuss specific complaints about safety and measures to reduce confrontations among inmates and between inmates and staff.
- Meet with the ILC and IGRC to discuss ways to improve the effectiveness and credibility among inmates of the grievance system.

Special Housing Unit

- Enable SHU inmates who do not pose a risk to other individuals to go to recreation in pairs. Monitor the recreation program to ensure that SHU inmates are not being denied or discouraged from attending recreation.
- Monitor the provision of meals and showers to ensure that all inmates have timely access to these services.
- Install cameras in the SHU.
- Ensure that a cell-study program is offered to all eligible SHU inmates.
- Institute a system-wide policy to provide inmates in SHUs throughout the state with athletic equipment like balls or chin-up bars when they go to recreation.

Staff Concerns

- Institute incentives for security staff to remain on the job for longer than 25 years.
- Ensure adequate coverage by security staff in all areas of the prison and for all inmate movement and work functions.
- Ensure that maintenance staff have working radios, particularly when they are assigned to areas with no security coverage.
- Review the employee disciplinary process to ensure that final dispositions are obtained in a timely manner.
- Address the employee concerns about their locker room, up-to-date computers, an employee wellness program and the procedures to get medical approval to return to the job after a leave for workers' compensation.