

Key Recommendations – Bedford Hills Correctional Facility

Women in Prison Project, Correctional Association of New York

The following is a summary of the Correctional Association's key recommendations for reform at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. We recognize that, in many cases, the authority to institute facility-specific and system-wide changes rests with multiple institutions. We have nevertheless made an effort to pinpoint the agencies that are most directly responsible for making decisions regarding the various issue areas that we have addressed in our report.

1. Grievance System

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility:

- Take proactive steps to eliminate retaliation against inmates by officers in response to filing grievances about officer misconduct.
- Designate a senior official other than the direct supervisor of an officer against whom a grievance is filed to be the primary investigator into grievances about staff misconduct.
- End the practice of informing inmates that they should write to specific members of the administration to resolve problems instead of using the grievance system.

2. Medical Services

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility:

- Evaluate and monitor medical staff members who inmates report do not provide adequate care. To assist in identifying problematic medical providers: (1) conduct regular meetings with the Inmate Liaison Committee (ILC) focused on medical issues; (2) administer an anonymous patient satisfaction survey among the inmate population; and (3) track relevant grievances and informal complaints.
- Develop a plan to ensure respectful treatment and quality medical evaluation by all nurses during sick call.
- Work toward ensuring that inmates with serious or chronic conditions are assigned a primary care provider who regularly sees them to treat their medical needs.
- Ensure timely notification of test results – both normal and abnormal – and timely follow-up care for abnormal test results.
- Ensure timely and consistent follow-up care for inmates who see outside medical specialists and require doctors who decide not to follow the recommendations of outside specialists to (1) document their decisions so that they can be reviewed by the Facility Health Services Director, and (2) explain their decisions clearly to patients.
- Ensure that inmates are able to see the dentist for conditions that are considered non-emergencies in a timely fashion.
- Provide special access to dental care for pregnant inmates, including a dental cleaning at least once during pregnancy.
- Ensure that doctors clearly explain the side-effects of medication that they prescribe to patients and require doctors to give each patient a written document summarizing the name, dosage, potential side-effects of, and proper method for taking medication that they prescribe.
- Actively recruit Spanish-speaking medical staff, and, in the absence of medical staff translators, use telephone medical translation services, such as those provided by AT&T's Language Line.
- Continue and expand outreach to inmates about the importance of being tested for HIV.

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- Investigate the low numbers both of inmates identified as having Hepatitis C and of those receiving treatment, and, in light of the recent changes to DOCS' policy, re-evaluate whether inmates with HCV are appropriate candidates for treatment.

New York State Governor, State Legislature, and Department of Correctional Services:

- Increase salaries for prison medical staff positions to aid facilities in recruiting qualified professionals.
- Increase Bedford's geographic pay differential and establish a linguistic ability pay differential for medical staff.
- Make sure that Bedford's medical department has three Automatic Electronic Defibrillators.
- Allocate funds to allow Bedford Hills to establish its own fully stocked and staffed pharmacy.

3. Personal Hygiene

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility and Department of Correctional Services:

- Consult with qualified gynecologists and other medical professionals to re-evaluate DOCS' current personal hygiene item policy and increase the number of sanitary napkins and rolls of toilet paper given to women inmates each month.

4. Food/Nutrition

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility:

- Investigate and resolve the problem of roaches and insects in the mess hall.
- Set up a meeting with the ILC and the dietician to discuss inmates' high level of dissatisfaction with the quality of food served at Bedford Hills.

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility and Department of Correctional Services:

- Consult with qualified medical professionals to re-evaluate the diet served to pregnant inmates and ensure that pregnant women are given an individualized special diet that meets their particular nutritional needs and that is rich in vitamins and nutrients essential to healthy reproduction.

5. Mental Health

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility:

- Work with staff from the Office of Mental Health to investigate reports that inmates receiving psychotropic medication are "overmedicated."
- Ensure that inmates on high doses of psychotropic medication are given appropriate jobs that they can perform without creating risks for themselves or other people.
- Investigate why more women are not being referred to Bedford's Intermediate Care Program (ICP).

Department of Correctional Services:

- Offer additional mental health training for all civilian and correction staff, not only for staff stationed in areas that have higher levels of contact with mentally ill inmates.

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New York State Governor, State Legislature, and Department of Correctional Services:

- Allocate additional funds for Bedford Hills to expand its ICP so that it can better meet the needs of inmates with mental illness and ensure a more safe environment for inmates and staff.

6. Disciplinary Confinement

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility:

- Ensure that inmates and officers are fully informed about disciplinary infraction rules and ensure that those rules are applied by officers in a clear and consistent manner.
- Allow inmates placed in the Special Housing Unit to take additional showers when they are menstruating.

New York State Governor, State Legislature, and Department of Correctional Services:

- Allocate additional funds for Bedford to expand its Therapeutic Behavioral Unit to allow the facility to better meet the needs of mentally ill inmates who commit disciplinary offenses and to ensure a more safe environment for inmates and staff.

7. Officer-Inmate Relations

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility:

- Initiate regular meetings with representatives of new and more experienced correction staff and the ILC under executive team supervision to facilitate communication and problem solving.
- Clearly post the Hamilton v. Goord guidelines in multiple places throughout the facility.
- Ensure that thorough, impartial and timely investigations are conducted into allegations of staff verbal, physical and sexual misconduct.
- Closely monitor those officers about whom a large number of inmates complain – especially those assigned to housing areas – and, where appropriate, recommend either their speedy removal or reassignment to non-contact positions.

Department of Correctional Services:

- Issue a directive outlining the Department’s “zero tolerance” policy with regards to staff physical and verbal harassment of inmates.
- Offer additional and ongoing gender-specific training on working in women’s facilities, appropriate staff-inmate interaction, and the pervasive histories of abuse among the female inmate population and the far-reaching effects of that abuse.

8. Inmate-Administration Relations

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility:

- Inform inmates in a timely fashion about any newly implemented policies or practices (including any new policies around visiting rules and procedures) and address any questions they may have.
- Ensure that all rules and policies are applied in a consistent and fair manner by all correction, civilian and executive team staff.

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9. NYSCOPBA, PEF, and CSEA

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility:

- Implement a non-financial rewards program for staff who perform their jobs especially well.
- Establish a formal mentoring program in which veteran correction officers can train and advise less experienced officers about ways to effectively and respectfully communicate with inmates and peacefully resolve situations that might otherwise result in serious staff-inmate confrontations.

New York State Governor, State Legislature, and Department of Correctional Services:

- Work toward restructuring the Tier III retirement system to provide incentives for correction officers to continue working after 25 years on the job.
- Increase Bedford Hills' geographic pay differential for civilian and correction staff.

10. Programs

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility:

- Actively recruit qualified academic and vocational staff who are fluent in Spanish and English.

New York State Governor and Legislature, and Department of Correctional Services:

- Increase Bedford's geographic pay differential and establish a linguistic ability pay differential for academic and vocational instructors.
- In light of DOCS' new GED policy, allocate additional funds to establish more academic classes with sufficient, quality staff at Bedford Hills.
- Allocate additional funds and/or partner with outside agencies to expand the number of vocational programming slots open to women and the types of programs offered.
- Allocate additional funds to allow Bedford Hills to expand its ASAT program's capacity to accommodate the current need and to shorten the lengthy waiting list.
- Reinstitute college programs in all state correctional facilities.

11. Law Library

Bedford Hills Correctional Facility:

- Install additional computers, acquire legal education CD-ROM disks, and offer supplementary legal training for law clerks and other inmates.

Department of Correctional Services:

- Consider allowing inmates limited use of the internet for the purpose of carrying out legal research in a supervised setting.

12. Clothing

Department of Correctional Services:

- Replace boots recently issued to the female population in state custody with new boots better suited to women's feet.