

Council 4 AFSCME is supportive of:

**Raised Bill 668, AAC Prison Overcrowding
Committee Bill 5096, AA Increasing the Number of Correction Officer
Raised Bill 5858, AAC Minimum Staffing Levels of the Department of
Correction**

Good afternoon, Chairman Lawlor, Chairman McDonald and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is David Moffa. I am president of AFSCME Correction Local 387. I am joined by Jon Pepe, the president of Local 391, and Luke Leone, president of Local 1565.

We urge you to increase the number of correction officer posts and parole officers on the job. We urge you to at the very least keep the 125 correction officer and 22 parole officer positions in Governor Rell's proposed budget. Our understanding is that most of the correction officer positions are already filled. Several were added to man the new dorms at the Carl Robinson correction facility.

Even with the addition of these positions the correction system remains seriously understaffed. I submit to you a report prepared by the legislature's nonpartisan Program Review and Investigations Committee staff. This report, completed in December of 2003, found that front line correction positions are more than 20%, or 700 officers, understaffed. I assure you that staffing has not gotten any better since this report was written. In fact, the major step that the administration seems to have taken as a result of this report is to dilute the "shift relief" factor, or staffing formula, to make it appear on paper as though we are better staffed.

Prison overcrowding is inherently dangerous. We ask for your help in alleviating it. It was detailed on a recent legislative tour of the Willard/Cybulski facility, that there are up to 30 inmates assigned to one toilet. A tour of the New Haven Correctional Center revealed that there are inmates crammed into areas that should be used for teaching and recreation. Hygiene suffers. There is a danger of spreading diseases such as the MRSA virus and drug resistant tuberculosis, both of which have been found in state correctional facilities. Overcrowding increases tension between inmates and staff.

There was a serious fight at the Carl Robinson facility a few months ago. This facility was the site of serious rioting in the early 1990s, resulting in the killing of two inmates, injuries to many officers and millions of dollars of damage to state property. Within the last six weeks, there have been a number of assaults on staff, most recently at Northern, Osborn and Enfield. We agree with the recent Hartford Courant editorial urging that the empty north block of the Cheshire correctional facility (374 beds) be used to house inmates to immediately alleviate overcrowding.

Our union also urges your help in tending to the large number of inmates with mental illness. We urge that steps be taken to meet the treatment needs of these inmates, as well as the needs of correction staff that have to deal with them.

We also believe that 13 of the parole officer positions added in the budget are already filled. Parole officers have a very demanding job in trying to integrate inmates back into society and prevent them from reoffending. These officers have more cases than they can adequately handle.

Our members take their duty to Connecticut's citizens very seriously. They strive to make our correctional facilities and our communities as safe as possible. We appreciate your concern in doing the same. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Journal Inquirer.com

NORTH-CENTRAL CONNECTICUT'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

03/11/2008

Union renews call for more prison guards

By Christine McCluskey, Journal Inquirer

SOMERS - Correctional officers gathered outside Northern Correctional Institution on Monday to advocate for increased staffing in the state's prisons in the wake of several recent attacks on officers by inmates.

Jon T. Pepe, president of Local 391 of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, which represents about 1,800 of the state's 4,800 correctional officers, said that in contrast to fights between inmates, lately "officers are being specifically targeted, and that's a concern for us."

He said prisons are overcrowded and a bill that's scheduled for a public hearing before the Judiciary Committee on Wednesday, which would require a formula to determine prison staffing levels, would take into account the number of employees who are available to work and prevent staff burnout.

Last month, there were two attacks on correctional officers at Northern, the state's only maximum security men's prison. Northern holds about 600 prisoners, including those on death row. Northern is also the facility to which prisoners who assault correctional officers are sent.

In addition to the attacks at Northern, on Feb. 18, there were fights at Osborn Correctional Institution in Somers and at the Enfield Correctional Institution that involved several inmates and injured correctional officers.

One of the Northern attacks, on the evening of Feb. 14, was by Lazale Ashby, 23, who is on death row for the rape and murder of a Hartford woman.

Jeffrey McIntyre, the correctional officer Ashby attacked, said Monday that he told Ashby to quiet down because he was making a lot of noise in his cell.

Shortly afterward, when Ashby came out of his cell unrestrained to go take a shower, "he sucker-punched me," McIntyre said. "He punched me right in the face."

McIntyre said he defended himself using techniques he'd learned in training until the quick arrival of other staff members. He missed one day of work after the assault.

"I think it's going to happen again," McIntyre said. He said correctional officers know there's always a possibility they could be assaulted, but the chances of that happening would be lower with higher staffing levels.

"I'd like to see more staff in all the prisons," he said.

McIntyre added that death-row inmates such as Ashby should be restrained when leaving their cells.

Rep. Karen Jarmoc, D-Enfield, said she and Rep. Kathleen Tallarita, D-Enfield, proposed the bill that would use the formula to determine staffing levels because the level of violence in the prisons lately has concerned them.

She said she couldn't predict exactly how many additional correctional officers the complex formula, which is used nationwide, would produce, but said it would be "a substantial increase."

Sen. John A. Kissel of Enfield, the ranking Republican on the Judiciary Committee, also has proposed increasing the number of correctional officers, as well as requiring the Department of Correction to notify state and local elected officials within 24 hours of any prison assault.

Kissel has said that while he applauds Gov. M. Jodi Rell's plan for 125 additional correction officers in her proposed budget, he wants to leave open the possibility of increasing staffing even more.

Brian Garnett, spokesman for the Correction Department, said Monday that, especially with Rell's proposal, "We believe that our facilities are appropriately staffed."

"Unfortunately, we have assaults in our facilities," particularly at Northern. "We do not tolerate that," Garnett said, but added that correctional officers know theirs is a difficult and dangerous profession.

"These men and women do a very, very difficult job," Garnett said.

He also said the Correction Department is willing to consider revisions to rules on when restraints are used on inmates and on notification rules.

Digest

CORRECTION OFFICER STAFFING

The objective of this study, begun in June 2003, was to determine if the current Connecticut Department of Correction (DOC) custodial staffing levels are sufficient for the safe and efficient management of the state's prison population. During the study, the following conclusions were reached.

· The Department of Correction is about 700 correction officers short of the number needed to fully staff the department's custody staffing plan. The shortage is covered almost exclusively by the use of overtime.

- There is no objective method for setting an overall custody staff level or inmate to custody staff ratio due to facility variation, making doing it by statute inadvisable.
- There is significant variation among the Department of Correction's facilities in terms of the number of inmates per custody officer and measures of safety.
- The Department of Correction's procedures for determining staffing needs are consistent with nationally recognized standards.
- Correction officers are generally distrustful of the Department of Correction's incident data and the ability of the department to determine the number of custody staff needed to assure safety.
- Correction officers generally hold the belief prison safety is better now than in the mid-90s, but not safe enough

SEGMENT OF PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT SUBMITTED BY COUNCIL 4
AFSCME