



**Lockdowns, Overtime,  
and Unmet Needs:  
Why we must solve the  
current prison staffing  
crisis**

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# Introduction

Ensuring the safe and secure operation of Illinois' prisons is a critical state function, yet the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) is facing a chronic staffing shortage that jeopardizes the health, safety, and well-being of staff and incarcerated people. High staff turnover and unfilled vacancies have profound implications for nearly all aspects of life for people living and working in the state's prisons. Incarcerated people are spending untold hours locked down with restricted access to programming, outside supports, and recreation; medical and mental health care needs are going unmet; staff are overworked and burned out; and safety and security are critically compromised. **These conditions cannot be sustained. Addressing this crisis is imperative to affirming the humanity of everyone living and working in Illinois' prisons.** The purpose of this report is to document the nature and scope of staffing shortages in Illinois' prisons, detail the harms to incarcerated people and staff, and make recommendations for urgent and vital action to address the identified challenges.

In July 2024, JHA shared a draft of this report with Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) and leadership of the primary union representing staff, the Illinois American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Union representatives provided JHA with written comments in August 2024, and draft review was conducted with IDOC in early October. JHA has incorporated this feedback. Importantly, as union leadership noted, *“addressing staffing concerns in the department requires a comprehensive strategy that focuses on long-term solutions and collaboration.”*

## IDOC Staffing Trends

As in much of the country, staffing shortages in Illinois prisons have been a long-held concern due to systemic issues unique to working in corrections. IDOC understaffing has become more pronounced in recent years against the backdrop of COVID-19; growing numbers of staff eligible for retirement; increasing demands on staff due to an aging prison population; increased demand for programming and treatment opportunities; crumbling infrastructure; and working conditions that have not kept pace with modern workforce expectations.

According to a [2023 Facility Master Plan Final Report](#) produced by CGL Companies on behalf of IDOC, the average vacancy rate for correctional officers based on authorized positions in Illinois prisons was 28% as of January 2022. Nine facilities had correctional officer vacancy rates above the IDOC average, including Pontiac, Dixon, Stateville, Hill, East Moline, Murphysboro, Menard, Vandalia, and Big Muddy. These included the highest security male prisons and those holding individuals with high medical and mental health treatment needs. Correctional officer vacancy rates were especially high in Pontiac (48%), Dixon (37%), and Stateville (36%). According to the report, Pontiac's staffing challenges were particularly pronounced and extended beyond security staff, with 60% of state nursing positions also reported vacant in 2022.<sup>1</sup> While staffing levels vary considerably across facilities and change over time, problems persist.

According to [IDOC staffing data](#) as of the end of March 2024, the Agency reported no improvement in staffing with a deficit of 4,314 in authorized facility-based staff, reflecting an overall 29% vacancy rate.<sup>2</sup> The shortage of security staff (totaling 3,513) accounts for the majority (81%) of the overall deficit in facility-based staff and reflected a 32% vacancy rate. Pontiac (56%), Joliet (56%), Kewanee (47%), Murphysboro (42%), and Dixon (41%) reported the highest authorized position vacancy rates for security staff. Information included by IDOC for the June 2024 Illinois Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability (COGFA) hearings indicated that IDOC had only budgeted for positions to partially close the reported gap in allocated staffing vacancies. A total of 2,927 authorized security staff positions (or 83% of vacancies) were reportedly allocated but not budgeted for in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024.

In draft review, IDOC provided some updated staffing numbers as of September 1, 2024. This indicated that there was a 2,933 deficit (28%) for security staff and an overall 23% deficit for authorized facility-based staffing, encouragingly reflecting some improvement in Agency staffing over the past six months.

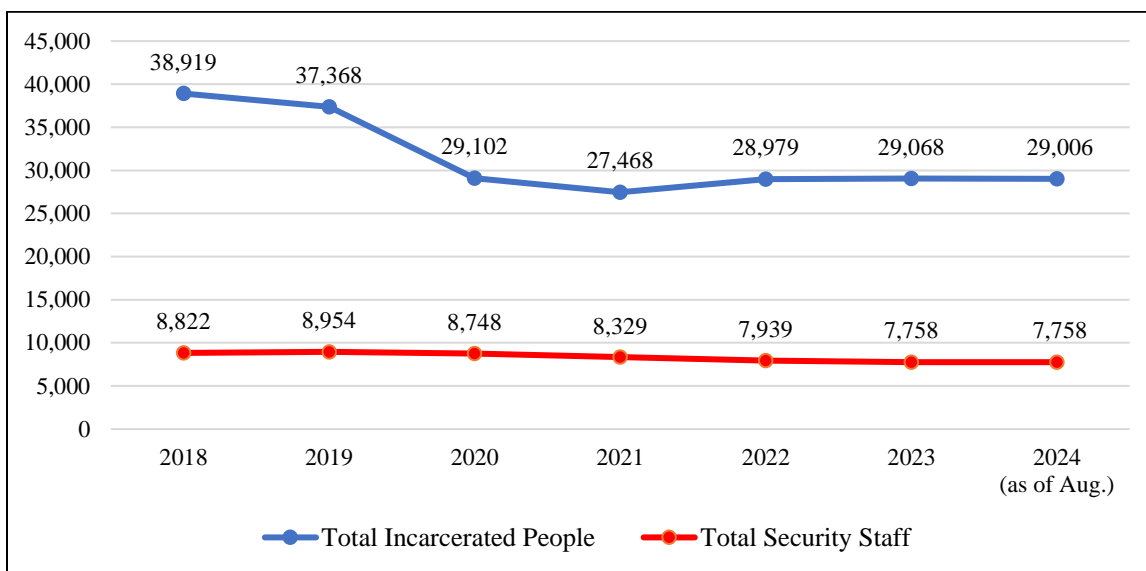
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<sup>1</sup> This report primarily focuses on staffing shortages among IDOC employees, not contract staff. However, it is important to note that only a small portion of IDOC healthcare positions are filled by IDOC employees; the majority of healthcare positions within Illinois prisons are staffed through a contract with Wexford Health Sources, a private prison healthcare company. Vacancies for both contract and IDOC healthcare staff positions are high.

<sup>2</sup> This excludes the following IDOC staff not based in a correctional facility: general office, adult education, parole, reentry, and field services.

IDOC prison population and staffing data show a steady decline in security staff numbers while prison populations have increased somewhat, coinciding with the easing of COVID-19 restrictions. As shown in Figure 1, there was a steady decrease in IDOC security staff between 2018 and 2023 resulting in an overall 12% reduction. Meanwhile there was a 25% decrease in the prison population. However, the prison population is up 6% from the lowest point in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1. IDOC Population Compared to Total Security Staff (End of Calendar Year)**



The IDOC [Quarterly Report](#) dated April 1, 2024 projects that the prison population will decrease from 29,221 as of the date of the report to 29,091 by the end of 2024. These projections align with overall prison population trends in Illinois over the past decade, which has seen a dramatic reduction in the number of people who are incarcerated in the state’s prisons. The prison population decreased by approximately 42% from nearly 50,000 in 2012 to just over 29,000 at the end of 2023. Nonetheless, there remains a significant imbalance between staffing levels and the prison population.

<sup>3</sup> Source: [IDOC Quarterly Reports](#) for population numbers and Operations and Management Reports for security staff numbers for [Fiscal Year 2025](#), [Fiscal Year 2024](#), [Fiscal Year 2023](#), [Fiscal Year 2022](#), [Fiscal Year 2021](#), [Fiscal Year 2020](#), and [December 2018](#).

Concerns over short staffing are reflected in staff responses to a 2022-2023 Staff Quality of Life (SQL) [survey](#) administered by JHA. The survey was made available online to all IDOC staff and contractors and received 143 responses from at least 18 different IDOC facilities.<sup>4</sup> The survey asked staff working in IDOC prisons to identify one primary area of concern about the facility where they work. Many staff respondents pointed to short staffing, with one respondent commenting, *“My primary concern is getting more staff and individuals to fill the entire facility. This place helps staff and individuals in many ways; being able to help more people all around and have great impact.”* Another respondent shared, *“Need more correctional officers. Shortage of Security staff and too much overtime affect many things, from frustration of both staff & incarcerated individuals to cancellation of programs and yard time.”*<sup>5</sup>

## Harmful Impacts of the Staffing Shortage in Illinois Prisons

JHA’s prison monitoring and survey initiatives have documented many harmful impacts of the staffing shortage on the quality of life in prisons for both incarcerated people and staff. Based on an analysis of IDOC administrative data and reports; findings from JHA’s prison monitoring efforts; JHA surveys of both incarcerated people and staff; and external reports on Illinois prison conditions, the following section details how staffing shortages have affected nearly all aspects of life in prison.

### Time Out-of-cell

The ability of incarcerated people to leave their cells or sleeping areas to participate in programming, attend medical appointments, visit the law library, go to the yard for exercise, take

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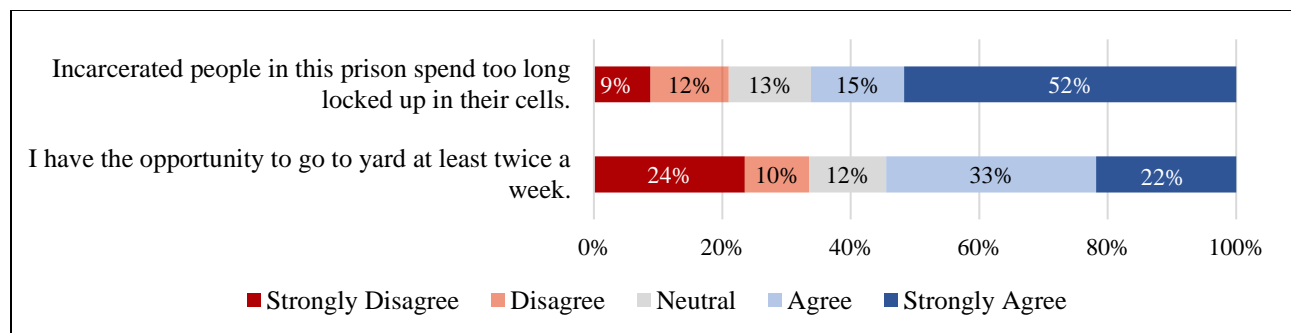
<sup>4</sup> In draft review, AFSCME representatives shared concern that survey responses from a small number of staff should not be viewed as representative. While JHA appreciates this concern, we note that we made the survey as widely available as possible, and the responses received are used in our work to share the viewpoints of people who chose to participate. We welcome more robust staff participation in future survey efforts. AFSCME representatives also suggested that some unidentified findings of this report *“do not necessarily align with the feedback we receive through a variety of means from our membership.”* JHA continues to invite AFSCME to share staff feedback they receive more widely to help advance the discussion of staffing issues and help find solutions.

<sup>5</sup> Due to the small sample size, SQL survey comments herein do not identify the facility. Survey comments from JHA’s Measuring the Quality of Prison Life (MQPL) survey of incarcerated people do identify respondents’ facility due to the large number of responses received (8,700+ across all IDOC prisons), better protecting anonymity.

a shower, or even eat a meal may depend on sufficient staffing levels to coordinate these movements throughout a facility in a way that ensures the safety and security of incarcerated people and staff. When facilities are short staffed, time out-of-cell or sleeping areas is usually the first thing to suffer. Facilities often resort to significant movement restrictions (including lockdowns) that limit or eliminate access to programming, work, recreation, phone calls, visitation, and other activities for significant periods of time. When these basic and essential programs and supports are limited or cut off altogether, there are significant impacts to mental health and levels of stress that make already difficult conditions more challenging for everyone living and working in prison.

In 2022-2023, JHA administered a [Measuring the Quality of Prison Life \(MQPL\) survey](#) of incarcerated people in Illinois prisons and received over 8,700 responses from all IDOC prisons of various security classifications.<sup>6</sup> Forty-two percent of incarcerated respondents indicated that they were not getting at least two hours a day out of their cell or sleeping area and generally reported spending too much time in their cell/sleeping area (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Time out of Cell/Sleeping Area Reported by Incarcerated People (n=8,616)<sup>7</sup>**



<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that some conditions reported by staff and incarcerated people in 2022-2023 surveys may have changed since the survey was administered. However, JHA conducts ongoing monitoring visits and receives continuous communications from people who are the most impacted by the system, in addition to review all available data and engaging in ongoing dialogue with administrators. In draft review, AFSCME questioned the accuracy of some unidentified facility conditions reported in surveys and asked if survey responses had been verified. We again note that including the perceptions of people most impacted by incarceration is of primary importance to monitoring work, as this affects climate and culture within prisons. Such perceptions from staff and incarcerated people are not presented as factual or unchanging, but as what was shared with us at a point in time, and this is presented and contextualized by information from other sources, including administrators, data, our own observations, draft review feedback, etc.

<sup>7</sup> The sample size for figures presenting SQL and MQPL survey data represents the number of survey respondents who responded to at least one question; therefore, the sample size for each question may vary.

When asked about the most negative things about life in prison, one survey respondent from Dixon commented, *“The lockdowns due to staff shortages. You never know if we’re gonna wake up on lockdowns and for how long. Even when you’re not on lockdown, they never run other programs like school, chapel, and yard. I have not been to the yard since May this year. The gym was closed down on March 2020 and it has not been opened yet. I doubt it ever will...”* One respondent to JHA’s SQL survey shared that *“The client spends 23 hours in the cell a day, that in itself is inhuman and stressful. This affects the mood and mindset of the individuals that we have to encounter each day.”*

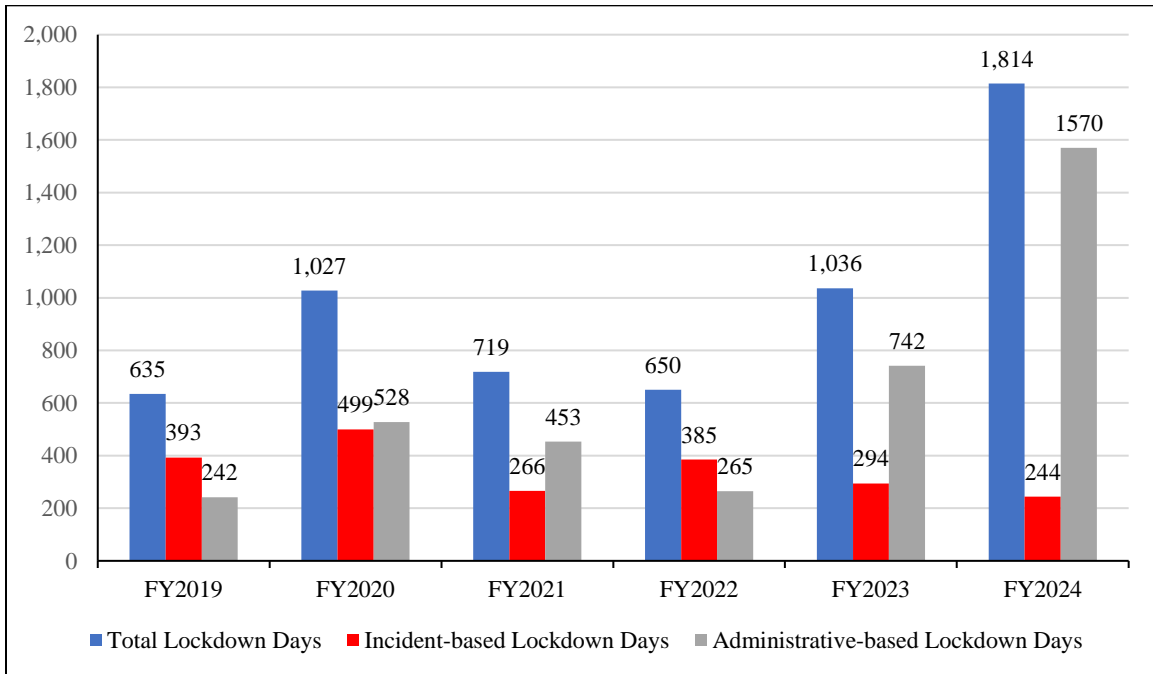
Data shared in IDOC’s Operations and Management Reports<sup>8</sup> corroborates these responses and suggests that the total number of lockdowns across the agency are on the rise since FY 2022. Lockdowns typically mean that all incarcerated people in a facility are subject to the extreme restrictions consistent with solitary confinement or restrictive housing. During these periods, incarcerated people are confined to their cells or sleeping areas for 22 to 24 hours per day with limited access to activities such as education, programming, visitation, recreation, religious services, and communal meals. IDOC lockdown data is broken down by administrative- and incident-based lockdowns. Incident-based lockdowns are used in the event of a critical incident that impacts facility security and operations, whereas administrative lockdowns are used for more routine disruptions to facility operations and are often linked to insufficient staffing levels, and in recent years, COVID-related quarantines.

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<sup>8</sup> Source: IDOC Operations and Management Reports for [Fiscal Year 2025](#), [Fiscal Year 2024](#), [Fiscal Year 2023](#), [Fiscal Year 2022](#), [Fiscal Year 2021](#), [Fiscal Year 2020](#), and [December 2018](#).



**Figure 3. IDOC Lockdown Days**



As shown in Figure 3, total lockdowns rose by 279% between FY 2022 and FY 2023. While there is wide variation in use of lockdowns reported by IDOC prisons (from lockdown reportedly being used rarely at one prison, to lockdown every day at another), as well as changes over time, IDOC’s data shows clear cause for alarm and need for remedial action agencywide. With an average of 151 lockdowns per month, FY 2024 exceeded the FY 2023 high, which averaged 86 lockdowns per month. Moreover, administrative-based lockdowns account for a majority of the lockdowns (60%) over the last six years. In FY 2024 they accounted for a staggering 86.5% of all lockdowns. The first two months of FY 2025 had 200 and 194 lockdown days respectively, 87% administrative. The increase in lockdowns is especially alarming in recent years as COVID-19 restrictions have eased. It is also important to note that based on JHA’s observations on monitoring visits and communications with incarcerated people and staff, the official lockdown days published by IDOC may present an incomplete picture. This is due in part to the fact that individual housing areas may be locked down and not captured in public reporting, which appear to only reflect facility-wide restrictions at most prisons. In addition, some facilities will restrict certain activities, such as yard and meals outside of cells or housing areas, but

otherwise maintain visits and other operations. These restrictions, while largely not counted as a lockdown in public Agency reports, function and feel much like a lockdown for people who are incarcerated and restricted to their cell or sleeping area.

## **Access to Medical and Mental Health Treatment**

Staffing shortages have devastating effects for some of the most vulnerable people incarcerated in Illinois prisons, including elderly individuals and those with mental illness, who often require significant medical and mental health care. Although the focus of this report is on IDOC non-contractual or specialized staffing shortages, it is important to call attention to alarming shortages in medical and mental healthcare staff, which has a substantial impact on the overall level and quality of medical and mental health treatment for people who are incarcerated and is the subject of ongoing litigation.

According to a [March 2023 report](#) released by a court-appointed monitor in *Lippert v. Jeffreys*, nearly half (46%) of health care staff positions (including medical and dental staff) in Illinois prisons were unfilled. The monitor reported that there were fewer health care staff at the time of the 2023 report than in 2019 when the Consent Decree was signed, stating that “...*limited, if any, progress has been made with respect to hiring.*” At Dixon Correctional Center, a facility with a large population of sick and elderly individuals, the report notes that incarcerated “hospice” workers and ambulatory aides who assist incarcerated people with limited mobility were providing clinical care due to lack of staffing. Moreover, the 39% vacancy rate in correctional staff at Dixon meant that there were not enough staff to transport people to outside appointments for specialty care. In the [December 27, 2023 Lippert monitor report](#), there had been no improvement; the report states that half of the IDOC contractor healthcare positions were vacant. As with security staffing, some prisons are even more understaffed for healthcare providers than the 50% average. JHA has visited prisons over the past few years where there have been literally no healthcare providers of various sorts and administrators were borrowing staff from other prisons, trying to hire, or addressing vacancies through use of temporary healthcare staff through Wexford or another contractual provider.

Access to medical care across IDOC is further exacerbated by frequent lockdowns due to insufficient staffing and outdated technology. Lockdowns may prevent transportation for outside medical care and transfers between prisons enabling increased levels of care. Also, use of

limited staff for transport to outside care due to lack of adequate provision and providers within prisons may also result in lockdowns for those remaining at the facility. At the time of this report, most patients in IDOC still only have paper medical records and a contract for electronic healthcare records had [been awarded in May 2024](#). As one staff respondent to JHA's SQL survey shared, *"Lack of adequate medical staffing creates a situation for some individuals that presents serious risks for their safety. This risk is heightened by lack of modern systems in the medical area, particularly lack of electronic prescribing systems and electronic access to medical records. As a physician who does not have the staffing assistance that I need to adequately address patient's concerns, I am frequently overwhelmed just trying to avoid disastrous outcomes."* Another staff respondent stated that the prison *"...cannot keep the place staffed, so the inmates go without their meds for weeks and months. There is NO nurse sick call at all. Mostly because there are no nurses. There are currently 2 RN's for the whole place. Mental Health staff is so thin, the minimum standards are not being met. They look good on paper, but the reality is this system is very broken."* Incarcerated people report long wait times to see medical providers and significant lapses in treatment for chronic illnesses due to the lack of medical staff. In response to JHA's MQPL survey, one incarcerated person from Centralia commented that, *"The healthcare is horrible here. It takes 3- 4 months to see a doctor and I have not had a chronic clinic for diabetes in [10+] months."*

Similar shortages have been documented with IDOC mental health staff. A [report](#) released in August 2022 by the court-appointed monitor in the since-dismissed *Rasho v. Jeffreys* lawsuit credits chronic understaffing as a major contributing factor to IDOC's noncompliance with the Settlement Agreement, stating, *"The Department remains in noncompliance with 13 major areas of the Settlement Agreement. Inadequate number of clinical and custody staff is the prime reason for these areas of noncompliance."* The monitor's findings indicated that IDOC maintained a 23% vacancy rate in clinical supervisory positions critical for quality mental health care, as well as significant staffing shortages at all IDOC facilities with a residential treatment unit (RTU). The monitor's report points to systematic failures in the provision of mental health care in IDOC facilities, such as delays in responding to requests for crisis intervention, inconsistent psychiatric follow-up care, and insufficient treatment and out-of-cell time for individuals with mental illness who are placed in segregated housing. These problems have only worsened due to contemporary staffing issues.

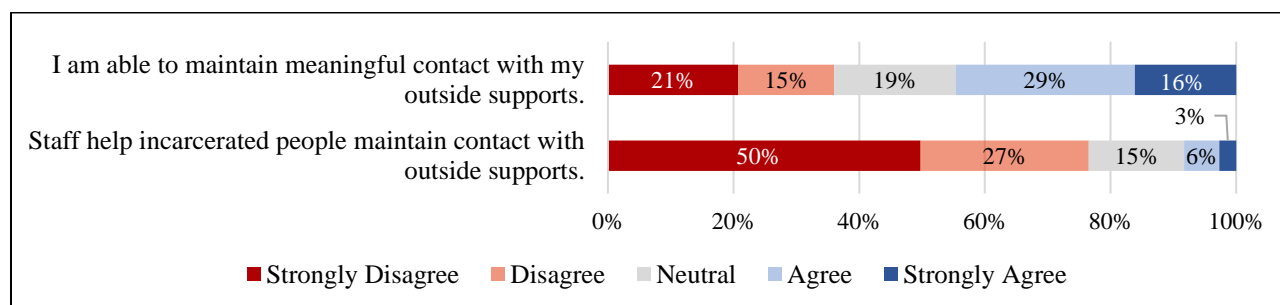
These deficiencies affect a large segment of the IDOC population. According to April 2024 [IDOC data](#), 44% of the incarcerated population was on the mental health caseload, and about 14% were considered seriously mentally ill. These figures are likely underreported due to a lack of both staffing and screening, in addition to the stigma surrounding mental illness. Forty-five percent of incarcerated people who responded to JHA's MQPL survey agreed or strongly agreed that mental health treatment is available, while 28% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Incarcerated people report to JHA on monitoring visits that while mental health staff may conduct quick rounds on restricted units, they are not receiving one-on-one care or groups and that they may occasionally see telepsych for medications. Their requests for greater assistance or the opportunity to speak with someone often go unanswered. One MQPL respondent from Big Muddy shared that, *"We have to wait 3 weeks after [sending a] kite to mental health to get a response or none at all. I have severe PTSD and tried to talk to them about it and they said I was fine and go back to the cell and do breathing exercises."* As the state's largest de facto mental health provider, IDOC is ill-equipped to provide sufficient treatment and care to individuals with mental illness.

## Access to Outside Supports

Reliable communication and access to information are essential for individuals in custody. Access to phones, mail, electronic messages, video visits, libraries, kiosks, and tablets enable incarcerated individuals to maintain connections with their loved ones, obtain legal information and guidance, and prepare for reentry. As such, it is imperative for prisons to ensure the availability of reliable and effective communication methods for those in custody, most of which rely on staff involvement to occur.

Responses to JHA's MQPL survey of incarcerated people indicate that it is difficult for them to connect with family and other outside supports due to lack of access to phones, issues with mail and e-messaging, and cancellation of in-person and video visits.

**Figure 4. Access to Outside Supports Reported by Incarcerated People (n=8,572)**



Incarcerated people report that there are so few phones available in many housing units that it can be difficult to impossible to make a call during the brief window of time they are allowed access. Many MQPL survey respondents also connected significant delays in the mail and other electronic systems for communication to staffing shortages, indicating that access to communicate with loved ones, attorneys, and other outside supports has been significantly hampered due to insufficient staff to process mail or approve and screen other communications. One respondent from Danville commented that *“Nothing is run consistently down here. Communication with family is poor due to the mail taking months at a time, as well as emails and video visits always being cancelled. It’s hard to get on the phone with only 8 phones.”* Another respondent from Decatur shared that, *“There’s no one working full time in the mail room we waited 3 weeks for our mail. Legal time sensitive mail isn’t priority here.”* While some incarcerated people are able to purchase tablets with messaging capabilities, the high cost make tablets out of reach for many individuals. Even for those who have a tablet, the ability to connect with family and other supports on the outside are often limited due to spotty signals and outdated technology inside most IDOC facilities.

A February 2024 [special report](#) issued by JHA on communication challenges in Illinois prisons emphasized that communication is a lifeline for people in custody, *“Frustration and pain permeate all aspects of communication for people in prison, and limitations in accessing information and maintaining supportive relationships cause people who are incarcerated significant stress and negatively impact their well-being and ability to plan for the future.”* To address the ongoing and systemic challenges with access to consistent and effective communication channels in prison, the report recommends a number of reforms. Select recommendations include: installing more phones, increasing mailroom staff, making tablets available to all people in custody free of charge and with enhanced features such as phone and

legal research capacities, improving the technological infrastructure necessary for tablets to be effective communication methods, increasing access to law libraries, and discontinuing any practice that restricts communication as a means of punishment.

## Program Participation

Meaningful and consistent access to programming, such as educational, behavioral health, and vocational programs, are hampered due to frequent lockdowns, insufficient correctional staff to facilitate safe movement, and shortages in teachers and other program staff. As observed during a JHA monitoring visit at Hill, for example, adult basic education classes had been cut from four down to one as of June 2023 due to high staff turnover. Many incarcerated people who responded to JHA's MQPL survey reported a desire to participate in programming but point to long waitlists and [rules](#) that prioritize people with earlier release dates as a significant barrier to accessing these coveted programs. The Illinois Higher Education in Prison Task Force [Report](#) indicated that as of May 2022, there were 5,440 people in IDOC on waitlists for Adult Basic Education (nearly one-fifth of the population) and 120 on waitlists for Adult Secondary Education programs.<sup>9</sup> A [new law](#) implemented in 2024 requires more public reporting regarding educational participation and waitlists. A MQPL respondent from Big Muddy shared that *"I can't get in any programs or get a job & I've been here for a year. They don't have a G.E.D teacher & I cant do any voc classes without my G.E.D I cant get in school either so I'm just here doing time when I could be somewhere else earning good time."*

Participation in programming in prison has significant benefits. Education programs in prisons, for example, have been shown to be particularly effective at preparing incarcerated people for [successful reentry](#), making facilities [safer](#) by lowering the number of [violent incidents](#), and reducing recidivism. A RAND Corporation [study](#) shows that incarcerated people who participate in postsecondary education are 43% less likely to recidivate than those who do not. One SQL survey respondent expressed concern regarding the lack of programming opportunities for incarcerated people, stating: *"...we are short 2 teachers and no one cares. We have had around 250-300 people on the Mandatory ABE waitlist always. Only approximately 10 new people go*

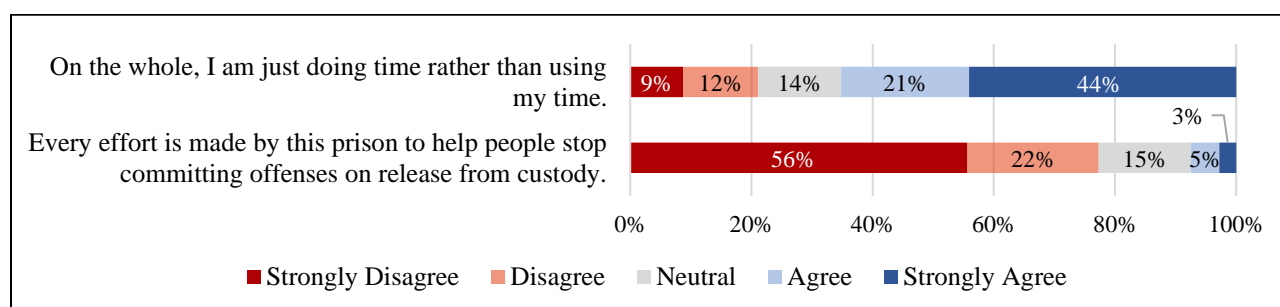
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<sup>9</sup> Note that these numbers were reported to likely be inflated somewhat due to IDOC data reflecting all individuals on waitlists, not unique program participants.

into class each month so many people go home that have not had the opportunity to take this class. How are they going to fill out job applications if they can't read and write.” Program participation also permits eligible incarcerated people to obtain [sentence credit](#). Lost program opportunities translate to longer sentences for people who would otherwise be eligible for an earlier release.

Although JHA’s recent MQPL survey of incarcerated people did not ask specific questions regarding programming, responses to related questions shed light on how incarcerated people spend their time in prison and their perceptions of the degree to which prisons are equipping people for release.

**Figure 5. Perceptions of Programming and Supports Reported by Incarcerated People (n=8,520)**

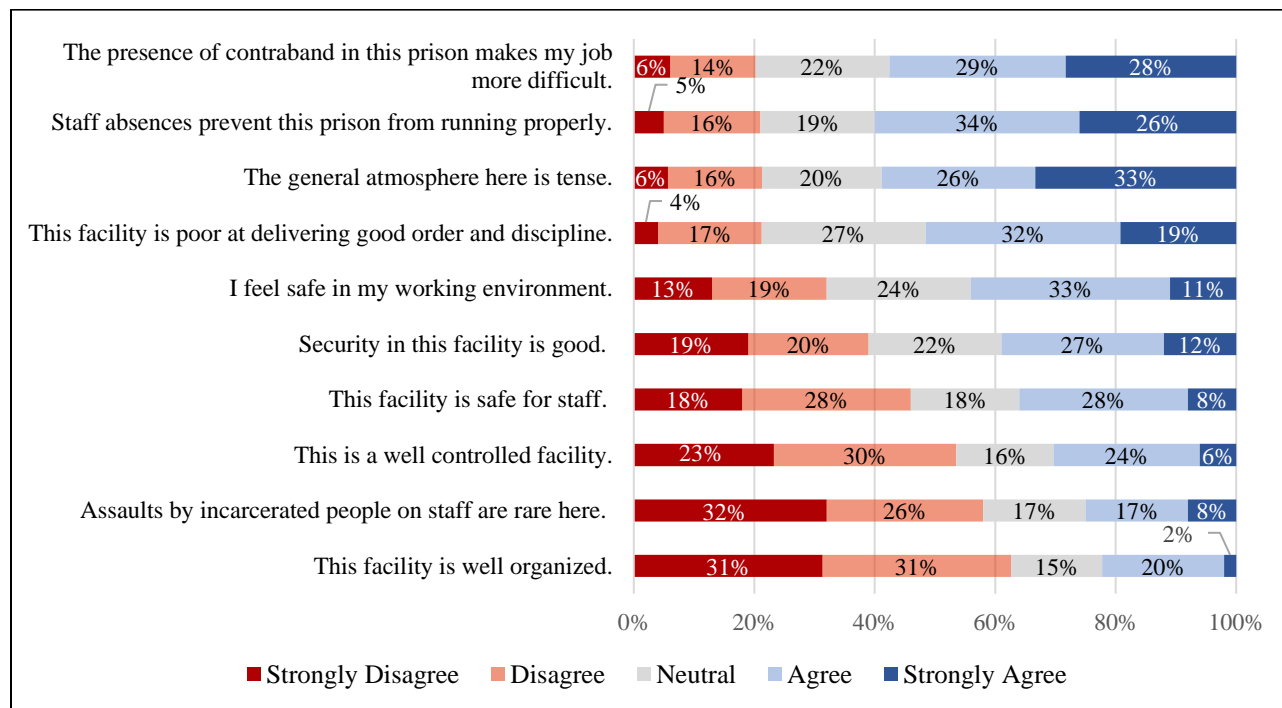


## Safety and Security

The majority (60%) of staff who responded to JHA’s SQL survey indicated that staff absences prevent their facility from running properly. Staffing shortages make all people living and working in prisons less safe. Insufficient staffing can mean that staff are unable to quickly respond to critical incidents or provide adequate supervision to prevent violence. Meanwhile, incarcerated people who are spending long stretches of time locked in their cell without access to programming, treatment, and outside supports may be more likely to act out and harm themselves or others. One SQL survey respondent described the tensions created by staffing shortages, stating: *“We are so short of Security staff that overall operations of the facility are shut down most days with lockdowns caused only by staffing. This causes higher hostility among individuals in custody and leaves all other departments with complications due to cancellation of normal programs and a lack of assistance available for many tasks.”*

Both staff and incarcerated people expressed negative perceptions of safety and security. As shown in Figure 6 below, staff who responded to JHA’s SQL survey generally rated facility operations and security poorly. Nearly half (46%) of staff survey respondents reported that they did not believe that their facility is safe for staff, while an alarming 58% disagreed or strongly disagreed that assaults by incarcerated people on staff were rare at their facility. One respondent commented that *“I’m concerned for staff safety here given our staffing levels”* while another respondent shared, *“The most stressful thing about working here is the uncertainty of things that could happen at any time. We are short staffed and the number of staff assaults has risen to a dangerous level in the past few years. Also, morale is at its lowest I’ve seen in over 10 years here.”*

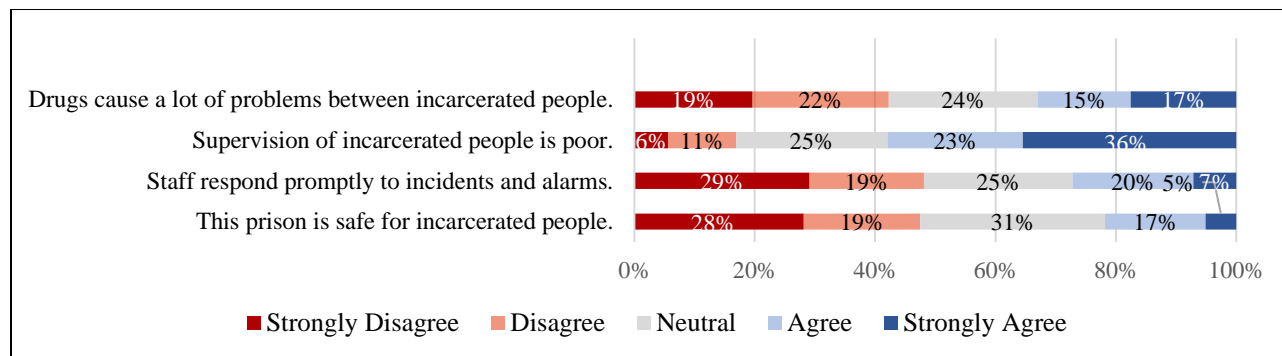
**Figure 6. Staff Perceptions of Prison Safety, Order, and Security (n=143)**





Incarcerated people who responded to JHA’s MQPL survey generally expressed a negative sentiment toward the perceived safety of incarcerated people and the quality of supervision.

**Figure 7. Perceptions of Safety and Supervision Reported by Incarcerated People (n=8,500)**



## Staff Overtime

High rates of overtime exacerbate already stressful working conditions. According to the 2023 state compliance examination [report](#) published by the Illinois Auditor General, overtime hours totaled 1,910,527 and cost IDOC \$95.5 million in FY 2022 (July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022). Stateville had the highest overtime rates, reporting a total of 296,451 hours at a cost of \$15.4 million. Pontiac came in second, reporting 179,545 hours and costing \$9.3 million. Based on data provided by IDOC in 2024, the agency paid over \$73 million in overtime for the first seven months of FY 2024 (July 1, 2023 – January 31, 2024). The three facilities with the highest overtime pay were Stateville (\$10.9 million), Dixon (\$5.3 million), and Pontiac (\$4.6 million). These facilities also had the highest staff vacancy rates, as reported by [CGL](#). These early numbers for FY 2024 suggest that the use of overtime to compensate for staff shortages continues to increase at an alarming rate, and the total cost of overtime for FY 2024 was set to far surpass the total for FY 2022.

In addition to overtime, reimbursement for compensatory time also drive up agency costs. Compensatory time means that instead of being paid an overtime rate for hours worked beyond their regular work schedule, staff receive time off equivalent to the extra hours worked. The

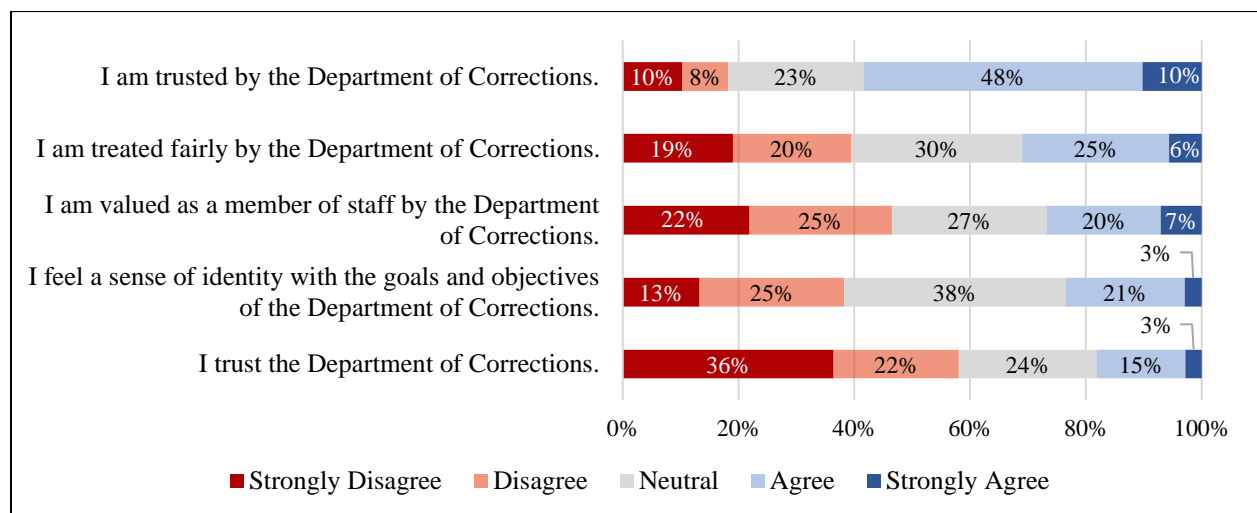
2023 Auditor General report indicated that IDOC exceeded federal standards for the accrual of compensatory time. During FY 2022 IDOC reported a total of 417,151 hours of compensatory time used/reimbursed at a cost of \$16.1 million. Stateville again reported the largest amount of compensatory time, totaling 49,890 hours and costing \$2.1 million. The second highest was Menard with 55,841 hours of compensatory time at a cost of \$2 million.

Based on the staggering use of overtime and compensatory time, it is clear that staff are shouldering an immense burden to maintain operations. These conditions cause stress and burnout among staff, and may ultimately push some staff to leave, which only makes conditions worse. Moreover, the cost of overtime and compensatory time to maintain operations with existing staff are exorbitant and appear to only be increasing.

## Staff Job Satisfaction

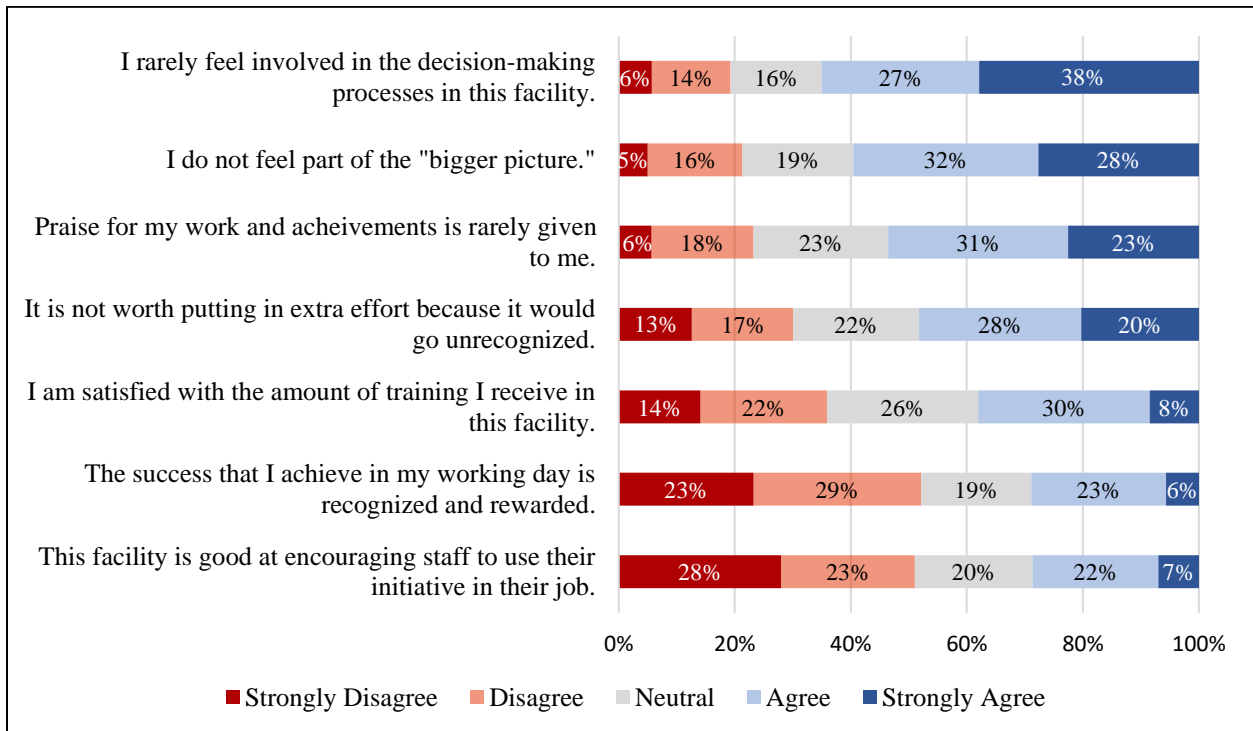
The stressful working conditions associated with IDOC’s staffing shortage put a strain on staff that undoubtedly affects how they feel about their job. Staff responses to JHA’s SQL survey show low job satisfaction across several measures. As shown in Figure 8, staff generally rated their relationship with IDOC poorly. Less than one-third of staff reported feeling valued as a member of staff by IDOC (27%) or feeling a sense of identity with the agency’s goals and objectives (24%). Only 18% of staff respondents indicated that they trust IDOC.

**Figure 8. Staff’s Relationship with IDOC (n=143)**



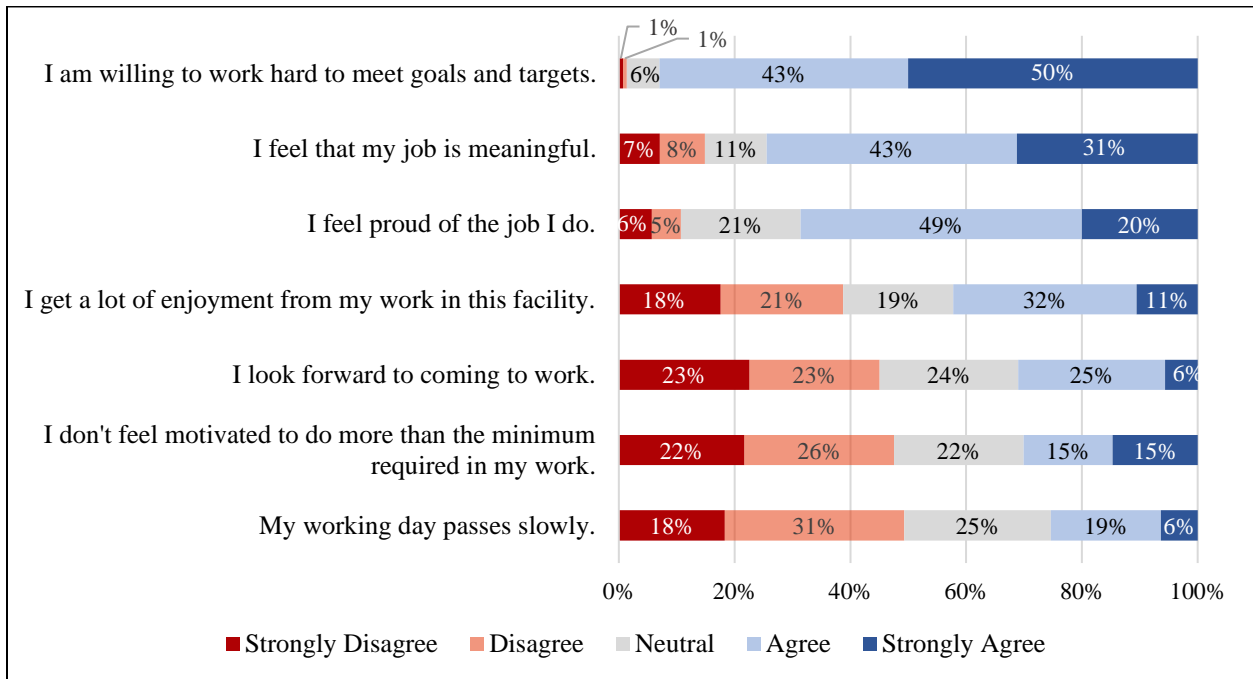
As shown in Figure 9, staff generally indicated that they do not feel appropriately recognized for their accomplishments and had mixed sentiment regarding their level of personal efficacy in their role.

**Figure 9. Staff Recognition and Personal Efficacy (n=143)**



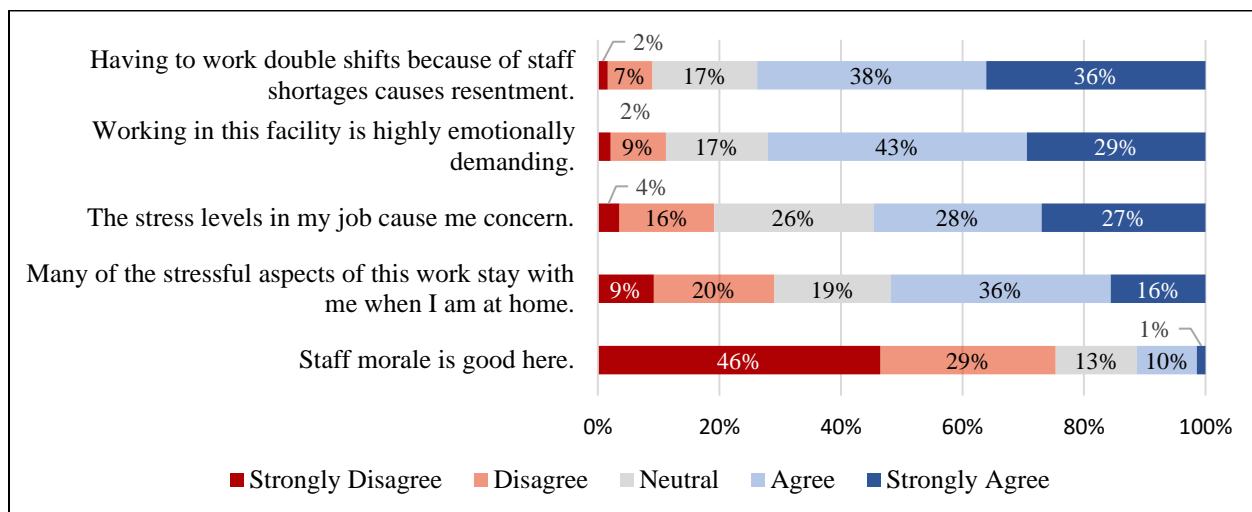
Staff responses also indicate that they are motivated but lack enjoyment in their work. Staff overwhelmingly reported a willingness to work hard to meet goals and targets (93%) and expressed feeling pride in their job (69%); however, less than one-third (31%) reported looking forward to coming to work. See Figure 10 below.

**Figure 10. Staff Involvement and Motivation (n=143)**



Staff responses to JHA’s SQL survey suggest that the IDOC staffing shortage is contributing to stress, burnout, and low morale among staff (see Figure 11). **Seventy-four percent of SQL survey respondents indicated that having to work double shifts because of staff shortages causes resentment.** When asked to identify one primary area of concern they have about their facility, one respondent stated, *“Staff morale is very negative, depressive, and very hard to get through a day without it engulfing you. Everyone you talk to has a negative attitude.”* Another respondent shared, *“Working short staffed. Every. Single. Day. Getting mandated. A lot. No hope for future. No one wants to work here or for DOC in general. The constant threat of lawsuits, especially now there is no staff to complete jobs fully.”*

**Figure 11. Levels of Stress and Morale Reported by Staff (n=143)**



## Recommendations

Although IDOC has instituted some reforms in recent years to address the staffing shortage, including the creation of staff wellness programs and a committee focused on this effort, much more needs to be done to ensure the safety and well-being of everyone living and working in Illinois’ prisons. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Addressing the staffing crisis will require a comprehensive strategy that focuses on long-term solutions and collaboration between IDOC, union officials, policymakers, advocates, and the community. This section offers recommendations to bring urgent relief to prisons facing staffing shortages and address the harmful impacts on both incarcerated people and staff.

### Recommendation 1: Increase Transparency

**Publish regular reports that provide data on the scale of the staffing shortage and its impact on operations.**

More transparency would allow external stakeholders, the public, and policymakers to better understand the nature, scope, and impact of the problem, and to partner with IDOC on

solutions. Facility staffing needs are unclear and must be revisited based on changing populations and current requirements. Relevant public data would include, but not be limited to:

- Staff vacancy rates by facility, including a breakdown by security, non-security, medical, mental health, and program staff (including both agency and contract staff).
- Staff turnover rate by facility.
- Number of incarcerated people on waitlists programming by facility, including a breakdown by program type (e.g., educational, vocational, treatment). IDOC should consider providing data consistent with the requirements of the [Higher Education in Prison Act](#) for all prison programs and work assignments.
- Information on use of voluntary and mandatory overtime, including the number of staff working overtime, the number of overtime hours, and the cost of overtime.

## Recommendation 2: Close Prisons and Consolidate Where Possible

**Continue to depopulate and close Illinois’ most inhumane prisons and consolidate the remaining population and resources into fewer, modernized, and rehabilitative facilities.**

As noted above, the Illinois prison population has seen a historic drop over last decade. The prison population decreased by approximately 42% from nearly 50,000 in 2012 to just over 29,000 at the end of 2023. According to [IDOC's Master Plan Report](#), this has created excess capacity across the prison system and an opportunity to rethink how facilities are utilized to better meet the growing programming and treatment needs of incarcerated people. Specifically, **CGL estimated that male prisons in Illinois will maintain 15% excess capacity (or 5,720 excess bed space) through 2027,**

*“Today’s lower population level provides an opportunity to right-size the agency, reducing outdated, ineffective, and costly-to-operate buildings and updating some of the remaining to better support IDOC’s goals.” – IDOC Master Plan Report*

**which accounts for 2% annual growth in the incarcerated population. Women’s facilities will also have excess capacity totaling an estimated 417 beds (22% excess capacity).**

In March 2024, Governor Pritzker and IDOC [announced](#) a plan to close and rebuild Stateville and Logan, two facilities that represent some of the worst prisons when it comes to crumbling infrastructure and conditions that are unfit for human habitation. According to CGL, *“Our review found the existing Logan Correctional Center to be inefficient, ineffective, and unsuitable for any population. The aging coal-fired power system, molding housing units, and facility layout all work in opposition to the mission and goals of the facility. IDOC should find a more suitable location for housing its incarcerated women.”*

The Governor’s announcement is an encouraging and important first step in addressing decades of disinvestment in some of the state’s most unfit facilities; however, **this announcement lacks critical details regarding how the state’s plan to rebuild Stateville and Logan will address the excess prison beds throughout the system, which current estimates place around 12,000.**

*“our water has legionella, our showers, have leeches, our housing units have black mold & asbestos, The housing units are falling in on us.”*  
– MQPL Survey Respondent from Logan

Moreover, IDOC’s urgent infrastructure needs are not limited to Stateville and Logan. CGL found during its facility conditions assessments, *“Only three out of 27 facilities reviewed had average facility condition assessments in the ‘Fully Operational’ range. The remainder were in the ‘Impaired Operation’ range with Stateville, Pontiac, and Logan approaching an ‘Inoperable’ rating.”*

**Rebuilding Stateville and Logan must be part of a comprehensive, long-term restructuring of the state’s prison population and footprint that leads to additional closures of the most inhumane prisons and buildings on prison grounds.** This restructuring must also include thoughtful consideration of facility location; facility designs that are human-centered and rehabilitative; and strategies for reducing the state’s reliance on prison as a response to social issues. Drawing on lessons from prior poor execution of previous consolidation efforts, repurposing and closures should be done with transparency and buy-in from key stakeholders. While specifics of transfers are considered sensitive information by IDOC in that they touch on institutional safety and security concerns, staff, incarcerated people,

and the public should be given more information in advance of facility changes in order to minimize disruptions and ensure continuity in critical services, such as healthcare.

Stakeholders, such as AFSCME, have [raised concerns](#) absent greater details of these [plans](#).

In draft review, AFSCME representatives stated, *“We object to the notion that closing prisons is the best way to address staffing concerns. To assume IDOC staff will undertake lengthy commutes or move their families to take vacancies if their facility is closed is seriously mistaken. As AFSCME testified during the COGFA prison closure hearings, there are limited vacancy opportunities in facilities surrounding both Stateville and Logan, and the closures will likely result in the loss of hundreds of IDOC employees who will not choose to retain positions within the department. Staffing issues at facilities could very well worsen with closures rather than improve, particularly if the incarcerated population is moved but staffing levels aren’t improved within the receiving facility. That said, we support the rebuilding of Stateville and Logan and continue to advocate for additional investments to address the decades of disinvestment in the state’s correctional facilities.”*

## **Recommendation 3: Improve Living and Working Conditions**

**Address the urgent deferred maintenance needs across IDOC and close prisons and buildings where the infrastructure is beyond reasonable repair.**

*“I have a general concern about the overall long-term impacts on the health of staff and incarcerated people. The recent legionella scare reminded me that on a statewide level, the quality of life for people living and working in prisons is LOW on the overall agenda.”*

- SQL Survey Respondent

According to the IDOC Master Plan Report, IDOC’s level of deferred maintenance is at a critical level, reaching and exceeding \$2.5 billion, the highest of any Illinois state agency. The report finds that **“At nearly every correctional facility, IDOC’s operational mission as well as safety and security are negatively impacted by its worsening conditions.”** Furthermore, the report states these costs will double every five years if left unaddressed. Based on



testimony provided by IDOC at a March 2024 House Appropriations Committee Hearing, the deferred maintenance cost had increased to \$2.7 billion. **The majority of IDOC prisons are not fit for creating a positive, productive working environment for staff, let alone to serve as safe and humane spaces necessary for meaningful treatment and rehabilitation of people housed in Illinois' prisons.**

Twenty percent of IDOC's bed capacity is concentrated in facilities that are over a century old. Most of Illinois' prisons were built before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) became law, making it challenging if not impossible for some facilities to comply with legally mandated accessibility requirements and protections against sexual abuse. One SQL survey respondent shared that *"The condition of various things in the facility are almost criminally neglectful. Most doors have rusted out frames and are impossible to open for most unless you use bodyweight to open the door. Totally not ADA compliant..."* A MQPL survey respondent from Big Muddy commented that, *"This prison is not ADA compatible, I am in a wheel chair. Doorways are too narrow and my chair barely gets through."* The majority (65%) of IDOC's prison population is housed at facilities built between 1970 and 2000. Many of these facilities are also plagued by significant physical plant issues and were not designed to meet today's staffing, programming, and treatment needs. A MQPL survey respondent from Centralia expressed concern that *"The rooms are made for two people but the space is so small it should only be one person per room. No air conditioning. Dayrooms too small."*

Some prison infrastructure issues are also exacerbated by low staffing levels. Facilities may lack critical maintenance staff and be unable to utilize incarcerated people for help with cleaning and repairs, for example, because there are insufficient security staff available to supervise them or a lack of programming to train them in the necessary trades. Some facilities may have too few administrative staff responsible for ordering supplies and facilitating contracts for maintenance tasks. Absent sufficient staff to carry out these basic functions, simple maintenance tasks fall through the cracks, and over time, lead to deteriorating infrastructure that compromises safety and creates unlivable conditions.

Beyond the monetary cost, there is an immeasurable cost of Illinois' failing prison infrastructure to the safety, health, and well-being of everyone living and working inside the prisons. Incarcerated people and staff are subject to unbearable conditions, such as exposure to

extreme temperatures; collapsing ceilings due to water damage; pest infestations; failing sewage and sanitation systems; and mold. A SQL survey respondent shared, *“These buildings are infested with mold, falling apart, toilets, showers, water issues DAILY.”* Decades of extreme physical plant neglect has undoubtedly undermined IDOC’s attempts to recruit and retain staff. **The Agency must make considerable progress toward addressing unsafe and inhospitable facility conditions so that recruitment and retention initiatives can be successful.**

## **Recommendation 4: Change the Culture**

**Re-center institutional policies, programming, and practices around the principles of human dignity, safety, and well-being of staff, incarcerated people, and the community.**

Working in a prison can be a rewarding job, but the everyday stressors of exposure to poor physical conditions, threats to staff safety, violence, suicide and self-injury among incarcerated people, and understaffing take their toll on staff health and wellness. **The majority of SQL survey respondents indicated that they feel that their job is meaningful (74%) and feel proud of the job they do (69%). However, most respondents also reported that working in their facility is highly emotionally demanding (72%) and that many of the stressful aspects of this work stay with them when they’re at home (52%).** According to the [National Institute of Corrections](#), correctional staff working in jails and prisons are at risk for adverse mental health conditions, including stress, burnout, and psychological distress from traumatic events experienced on the job.

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A 2023 report by Chicago Beyond ([2024 updated version found here](#)) describes the collective environmental harm of correctional institutions on correctional staff and incarcerated people. It details that correctional officers live approximately 20 years less than the national average, while incarcerated people lose approximately 2 years of life for each year in confinement. Thirty-four percent of correctional officers in security roles meet the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), five times higher than the national rate, while 60% of incarcerated men experience moderate to severe PTSD. Correctional staff and people incarcerated in jails are 2.5 and 3.5 times more likely to die by suicide than the national average, respectively. In order to break the cycle of harm and trauma in carceral settings, the Chicago Beyond report calls upon corrections to retire its focus on chronic control – the idea that people are safest when every behavior is tightly regulated – and instead invest in holistic safety. In the long run, chronic control, including the use of solitary and high-security supervision to control and manage behavior, is ineffective at producing safer facilities and safer communities. Instead, the report advocates for holistic safety, which is built on the principles of value, health, connectedness, trust, and personal agency. Similarly, the [Vera Institute of Justice’s Reimagining Prison](#) initiative advocates for correctional practices that are based in human dignity. It roots correctional culture change in the acknowledgement of intrinsic human worth, the importance of personal relationships, and respect for a person’s capacity for growth and change.

In draft review, IDOC emphasized that they have been partnering with Chicago Beyond around considerations such as holistic safety and staff wellness, and plan to continue to do so. Additionally, in the past few years they have otherwise expanded their staff wellness and retention efforts, including [a novel initiative](#) that involved staff’s family members, and have expanded recruitment efforts. IDOC again noted the challenges of losing staff to state and other positions where employees can work in less restrictive conditions or from home.

**IDOC should implement meaningful, comprehensive, staff-led culture change that increases job satisfaction and facility safety.** Most staff who responded to JHA’s SQL survey indicated that they don’t feel involved in the decision-making process in their facility (65%) and do not feel part of the “*bigger picture*” (60%). Sixty-nine percent of SQL respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their prison was poor at communicating reasons for decisions to staff. Similarly, 78% of incarcerated people also reported that the prison was poor at giving incarcerated people reasons for decisions. **IDOC should regularly solicit input and feedback from staff and incarcerated people, and should be responsive to their feedback and requests, as appropriate.** IDOC should also consider creating opportunities for staff and incarcerated people to have a voice in and an ability to influence agency and facility policies. Increasing the involvement of staff and incarcerated people in Agency decision-making and keeping them better informed of policy decisions, including their rationale, will help to enhance personal efficacy. Such engagement should be transparent and inclusive.

**IDOC should identify ways to better prepare and train staff to advance the Agency’s rehabilitative mission and support incarcerated people.** The majority of incarcerated people who responded to JHA’s MQPL survey indicated that they are not treated as a person of value (74%) or as a human being (60%). Similarly, nearly half (46%) of staff respondents to JHA’s SQL survey reported that they do not feel like they are valued as a member of staff by IDOC, and only 38% percent reported that they are satisfied with the amount of training they receive. Moreover, most (75%) staff respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there are times where management at their facility fail to support staff in dealing with incarcerated people.

**IDOC should consider implementing strategies that would reinforce trust, shared humanity, and positive relationships,** such as routinely acknowledging the contributions and accomplishments of staff and incarcerated people, providing training and resources on creating a culture of inclusion and positive affirmation, and training for staff on strength-based approaches to working with incarcerated people.

**IDOC should continue to invest in both peer support and external resources to help staff and incarcerated people cope with trauma and improve their mental wellbeing.** In recent years IDOC has undertaken efforts to address staff wellness by designating spaces – referred to as Staff Wellness Rooms – for staff to recover from traumatic encounters. IDOC has also established Staff Wellness Response Teams that are available at every facility for staff who

need support. These teams receive quarterly trainings in stress management and peer support strategies. Responses to JHA's SQL survey of staff suggest that IDOC should continue to expand access to wellness programs in addition to union initiatives. For example, the majority (58%) of SQL survey respondents indicated that staff need more training and support in dealing with the effects on them of suicide and self-harm. Chicago Beyond's 2023 report ([updated in 2024](#)) also suggests nontraditional wellness programming (e.g., yoga, meditation) and a focus on the creation of calming spaces in prisons through thoughtful design (e.g., use of murals, natural light, greenery). Given staffing deficits and lack of support for incarcerated people, particularly relating to mental health and use of isolation, greater use of peer support and trauma responsiveness for those in custody is also urgently needed.

## **Recommendation 5: Streamline the Hiring Process**

**Reform the hiring process to address process delays and administrative roadblocks.**

Inefficiencies in IDOC's hiring practices have plagued the agency for years. As documented in a [2015 policy paper](#) by JHA, the hiring process is slow, overly complicated, outdated, and rigid. It is a significant impediment to addressing the staffing crisis. One SQL survey respondent shared that they are so fed up with the dysfunctional hiring process that they see closing prisons as the better solution, stating: *"We cannot make up for the staff shortage by the current hiring methods and will have to drastically reduce this facility's capacity if nothing changes... We need a large-scale hiring effort led by Springfield... but they continue to only make the hiring process longer and more difficult. The more practical solution unfortunately seems to be to close several IDOC facilities in an effort to consolidate the remaining staff. I would rather see facilities close (including my own) instead of seeing programs and buildings continue to have to be abandoned due to there being no one there to staff them."*

In draft review, IDOC noted that they had made changes to reduce the length of time between recruitment events and getting people hired and to the academy. Additionally, they noted that they were considering further reforms, such as implementing more regional trainings so that staff would not need to spend as much time away from home.

While IDOC and other involved Illinois' agencies have made some recent reforms to the hiring process, more change is needed. IDOC should consider reforms that would further streamline the process, including:

- Revising [A.D. 3.2.106](#) to exempt people with college credit from all or part of the written examination for employment.
- Requesting an exemption from [Administrative Order 2](#) to simplify the interview process and allow candidates to forego [Rutan](#) certification, which was removed as a state agency hiring requirement in 2022. Rutan rules put restrictions on who IDOC can interview, the way that interviews are conducted, and how candidates are evaluated for selection.
- Transitioning to an electronic process for managing the hiring and screening process, including automating appropriate stages of the process that could significantly cut down on processing time.
- Updating to an automated timekeeping system and process for creating staff schedules to ensure more efficient and accurate data for IDOC decisionmakers as they seek to regularize staff schedules and comply with the 2023 Illinois Auditor General's [audit recommendations](#).
- Completing and publishing a comprehensive workforce planning analysis based on allocated headcount, overtime hours, and other factors. A comprehensive and public study would ensure that headcounts are based on the level of staffing needed for a facility to function safely and effectively regardless of external budgetary pressures.

## **Recommendation 6: Expand Recruitment and Retention Incentives**

**Use financial incentives where necessary to further support much needed reforms to prison conditions and culture.**

In response to critical understaffing across the agency, IDOC has stepped up its recruitment efforts in recent years. IDOC graduated its first class from a new training academy in October 2022 and rolled out a revised [policy](#) for recruiting new staff in February 2023, which requires development of a written recruitment plan; engagement with local colleges, universities, and

community-based organizations; participation in recruitment events; and that staff involved in recruiting efforts receive training on IDOC's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

According to input during JHA's prison monitoring visits, there are many challenges to staff recruitment, including the length of time to hire people. Efforts to more quickly onboard new security staff may be impeded by restrictions in class sizes to 100 people at a time and inability to stagger class start times at the new academy. IDOC hiring data suggests that hiring of security staff is lagging behind non-security staff. According to an IDOC Labor Relations staff at a [May 10, 2024 COGFA hearing](#), IDOC hired 581 security staff and 635 non-security staff in FY2023, and hired 509 security staff and 1,024 non-security staff in FY2024. This discrepancy is concerning given the 32% vacancy rate for security staff compared to the 22% vacancy rate for facility-based non-security staff.

In July 2023, Governor Pritzker [announced](#) the ratification of the state's latest contract with the AFSCME Council 31, Illinois' largest public employee union that represents correctional staff. The [agreement](#) provides a 4% pay increase applied retroactively to July 1, 2023. In total, the base wages will rise 17.95% over four years. The new [agreement](#) also includes an expansion of parental leave to 12 weeks, increases to longevity pay and the shift differential, which is a financial incentive to work shifts outside of normal working hours. An additional feature of the agreement is a pilot program for recruitment incentives for positions with high vacancy rates. These incentives may help efforts to increase IDOC recruiting, but IDOC should also consider offering retention incentives. The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) has led the way in implementing retention incentives. In late 2022, the BOP introduced [retention bonuses](#) of up to 8% for retirement eligible employees. While evidence for the effectiveness of recruitment or retention incentives is limited, BOP leadership has emphasized retention incentives' efficacy over recruitment incentives. In 2020, the BOP Acting Director [stated](#) to Congress that BOP staffing problems stemmed "from a retention problem rather than a recruitment problem... increasing retention incentives would be the most efficacious solution" to improve staffing rates. BOP officials relied on staff exit surveys to determine that retention was driven by insufficient pay or benefits, according to the [U.S. Government Accountability Office](#).

IDOC security staff hired before 2011 are eligible for the state's [Tier 1 Alternative Retirement Formula](#), which allows them to retire with full benefits earlier than state employees under the regular retirement formula. Some IDOC staff have commented that this program incentivizes



them to retire when they are eligible for full benefits, which for those under Tier 1 is at an earlier age than other state employees. This retirement opportunity, while disadvantageous for IDOC's retention efforts, is an important benefit for staff who endure difficult working conditions over the course of their career. As such, IDOC should consider offering retention bonuses to retirement-eligible staff to encourage them to maintain employment, taking into careful consideration the benefits and risks to the health and safety of staff.

In draft review, AFSCME representatives provided the following comments relating to employee state pensions and the Tier 2 pension plan for employees hired after 2011: *“We agree that the state pension is an important benefit for staff who endure difficult working conditions over the course of their career. In fact, we would contend that the pension is one of the most important benefits offered by the state for recruitment and retention... Due to the strenuous and hazardous nature of the job, it is very common for public safety employees across the country to have an earlier retirement age... According to reports from a broad spectrum of IDOC employees, it is the Tier 2 structure and its requirements to work longer for a lesser retirement benefit that is driving the staffing and retention issues in the Department of Corrections. Addressing the inadequacies of the Tier 2 retirement benefit is the most important means to improve recruitment and retention in IDOC...”*

Successful recruitment and retention indicatives are predicated on a host of factors, such as desirable working conditions, competitive pay and benefits, and opportunities for career advancement. Increasing pay and implementing recruitment and retention incentives on their own will not solve the staffing crisis. In fact, in many jurisdictions, correctional staffing shortages have persisted despite these financial incentives. Such incentives must be implemented alongside efforts to improve living and working conditions inside prisons, enhance safety and security, and transform the culture to promote the safety, health, and well-being of staff, incarcerated people, and the community. It is also important to acknowledge that in a correctional environment certain benefits available in many modern-day work places, such as opportunities to work remotely and constant access to one's cell phone, are not available. IDOC recently identified these barriers in a report submitted to the Illinois Department of Human



Rights<sup>10</sup>; input from current staff to determine offsets or ways to address these concerns is critical to modern recruitment efforts.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

**As a first step toward addressing the staffing crisis, more information and input are needed.** Utilizing an independent consultant to conduct a comprehensive workforce planning analysis, much as IDOC did with the CGL analysis of the issues and costs related to prison system physical infrastructure, is a productive and unbiased way to accomplish this. JHA recommends that such an analysis include:

- Understanding the scale of the staffing shortage;
- An independent, mixed methods study of the root causes of the staffing shortage in Illinois prisons;
- Identifying actionable solutions to address the staffing shortage;
- Engaging diverse stakeholders in the planning and implementation process;
- Creating an implementation plan for key reforms; and
- Establishing a mechanism for evaluating performance against goals and making it publicly available.

Addressing the staffing crisis in Illinois prisons will require bold action and collaboration with diverse stakeholders. Efforts to improve and sustain staffing levels should prioritize transparency regarding staffing challenges, improved living and working conditions, comprehensive training and professional development programs, investments in staff support services, targeted recruitment and retention incentives, updates to technology, and streamlining

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<sup>10</sup> [FY25 Affirmative Action Plan](#), filed by the Illinois Department of Corrections with the Illinois Department of Human Rights, notes “[t]he structural barriers to increased recruiting facing the Agency include shifting attitudes and changing needs among the target population and population groups. The barriers include: COVID-19 vaccination and testing mandates, working shifts (nights and weekends), limited ability for cell phones usage at correctional facilities, current retirement options, limited opportunities for part-time and remote work. Anecdotal information suggests a current stigma toward law enforcement entities in some communities affecting recruitment.”

of the agency's hiring practices. Through these comprehensive strategies, Illinois can mitigate the staffing crisis; increase the safety and security of its correctional facilities; improve the health and well-being of staff and incarcerated people; and better fulfill its mandate to rehabilitate those serving time in IDOC facilities and prepare them for release.



This report was written by JHA staff. Media inquiries should be directed to JHA's Executive Director Jennifer Vollen-Katz at 312-291-9183 or [jvollen@thejha.org](mailto:jvollen@thejha.org)

Incarcerated individuals can send privileged mail to report concerns and issues to the John Howard Association, P.O. Box 10042, Chicago, IL 60610-0042. JHA staff read every letter and track this information to monitor what is occurring behind prison walls and to advocate for humane policies and practices. Family and friends can contact JHA via our website [www.thejha.org](http://www.thejha.org) or by leaving us a voicemail at (312) 291-9183.

Since 1901, JHA has provided public oversight of Illinois' juvenile and adult correctional facilities. Every year, JHA staff and trained volunteers inspect prisons, jails, and detention centers throughout the state. Based on these inspections, JHA regularly issues reports that are instrumental in improving prison conditions. JHA humbly thanks everyone who agreed to be interviewed for this report and who graciously shared their experiences and insights with us.

