

justice & compassion

To: Commissioner Blanche Carney

From: Claire Shubik-Richards, Pennsylvania Prison Society Executive Director

Regarding: ASD / Mod-3, DC, PICC walkthroughs

Date: March 1, 2022

Copied: Philadelphia County Government Officialsⁱ

Pennsylvania State Department of Corrections

Prison Society Board of Directors

This memorandum summarizes the Prison Society's walkthroughs of Administrative and Special Detention (ASD), Modular 3 (Mod-3), Detention Center (DC) and Philadelphia Industrial Correctional Center (PICC) this past fall.

These walkthroughs reinforced issues we have brought to your attention in previous memoranda including:

- Lack of staff supervision while people spend 23 hours or longer locked in cells.
- Limited access to phones, with several phones broken for extended periods.
- Limited access to poor-quality video calls.
- Little access to programming, books, and in-cell activities.
- Delays in access to counseling.
- Limited access to cleaning supplies and showers.
- Limited access to clean laundry.

In addition to the issues listed above, new issues that surfaced include:

- Rodent infestations, particularly in DC.
- Severe delays in the delivery of mail.
- No refunds when commissary requests are not fulfilled.
- Staff asking people in custody to falsify logs.

The Prison Society requests a written response to the findings of this memorandum within two weeks of receipt. In that response, we also request an update on the actions Commissioner Carney stated the Department would undertake in her

October 26, 2021, letter to the Prison Society. In that letter, the Commissioner stated that the Department would:

- Fix the inoperable emergency in-cell buzzers.
- Review the "process regarding write-ups" for people in segregation.
- Review the grievance process.

Background

The Pennsylvania Prison Society serves as Pennsylvania's independent ombuds and monitor for county and state correctional facilities. On September 28, 2021, Prison Monitoring Director Noah Barth, and three Society volunteersⁱⁱ conducted a walkthrough of ASD, Mod-3, and portions of DC. This trip was cut short due to scheduling constraints of PDP staff.

On November 14, 2021, Noah Barth and two Society volunteersⁱⁱⁱ were joined by Philadelphia Prison Advisory Board members Sara Jacobson, Rachel Eisenberg, Minister Rodney Muhammad, Kimberly Ramirez, and Kristin Quinn to complete a walkthrough of DC. They additionally conducted a walkthrough of PICC. This memorandum combines the findings and recommendations from both visits.

The walkthroughs included a tour of seven housing areas across the four facilities, and a total of 85 structured interviews with incarcerated people. All interviews were voluntary, anonymous, and interviewees were randomly selected. At ASD and Mod-3 we conducted interviews with 15 women through one-on-one conversions at tables and cell doors. At DC, we conducted small group interviews with 50 men in dormitory units. At DC we conducted five interviews with women at cell doors in Unit C. At PICC we interviewed 15 men in one general population and one RHU (Restricted Housing, or "segregation") unit through one-on-one conversions at their cell doors or at tables.

Observations from the Walkthroughs and Interviews

Locked in Cells for Extended Periods

Out of 85 interviews, not a single person was receiving the court mandated three hours of out of cell time. The majority of women and men we spoke with across all facilities stated that they are not allowed out of their cells in a consistent or predictable manner.

In PICC G unit, six men reported being allowed out of their cells one hour per day during the week. On the weekend, they stated they are not allowed out of their cells. They explained that this because there are no corrections officers present on the



unit on weekends. In contrast, in Unit J at PICC - a restricted housing unit- one man reported that he receives "twenty minutes, if that" of out of cell time per day and another reported an hour out of cell on weekdays. A third man stated that when there is out of cell time, it is inconsistent. He explained that "some guards allow them out for an hour, some only 40 minutes."

In Mod-3 two women said that they come out of their cells everyday but only for one to two hours, and never on the weekends.

In DC, we spoke to men in units G and I, both dormitory units housing 40-80 men, and women in Unit C, a unit with double-person cells. Men confined in DC Unit G reported not being let out of their dormitories for two to five months. One man said they get out "whenever the guards feel like it." The other group members agreed. Two men in another group we interviewed in that unit said that they "never" get out of their cell and reported that staff tell them to sign a "rec sheet" falsely stating that they received out of cell time. In DC Unit I, two men stated that they had not been outside of their dormitory in the three weeks they had been in the jail. Two other men stated that they never leave their dormitory except a once per week trip to the gym and a once per week trip to the law library

In contrast, one woman in DC Unit C reported that she was in fact able to leave her cell every day. She stated however that how many times a day depended on which staff members were present and only for "close to an hour, sometimes not so much."

Two of the six women we spoke to in ASD, who are housed in a dormitory, were the only other people we interviewed who reported coming out of their housing area daily.

Several individuals we interviewed expressed concern that lack of out of cell time led to frequent fights. Two men we spoke to in DC Unit G, when asked if they witnessed any fights in the prison stated "What do you think you get when you put a dog in a cage for 24 hours, seven days a week? What do you think?"

No Staff Supervision at Night

Thirty-two people reported that staff were either not present at night or were unresponsive. This was reported in all four facilities.

In ASD, one woman reported that at night there is only one corrections officer present in the central control area (i.e., "bubble") and they need to stand and shout to get that officer's attention.



In Mod-3, three women reported "on the weekends, no one is on the unit. If (there's an) emergency, we're fucked."

In PICC Unit G, one man stated "we need more staff. At night nobody is around." In the same unit another man reported that a specific officer "goes on break" every day 12:30pm-1:30pm, leaving the unit completely unattended.

In DC Unit G, four men stated that frequently there are only one or two corrections officers in the central control area (i.e., "bubble"). They reported that they had shouted for attention in the past and the officers had not responded, either because they could not hear, or because they were the only officer assigned and were not able to leave the central area unattended. Similarly, in DC Unit I, one man reported being epileptic and stated, "there was one time I caught a seizure at night, and they were screaming for hours to get a guard who had left his post." Another man in the unit commented "a person could get killed in here man!" and explained that at night there are typically no staff for intervals as long as five hours.

Even though we did not specifically ask about in-cell buzzers, nine people across the four facilities, reported either that they do not work or that staff do not respond them.

Limited Access to Phones and Video Calls; Delays in Mail

Issues regarding access to phones and tablets for video calls were reported across all four facilities. Twelve people reported issues with phone access, and 22 reported issues with tablets for video calls.

Broken phones were reported in PICC Unit J. We were told they had been broken for six months. In DC Unit I, two men reported there are four phones in their dormitory of 41 men, but that all four were currently turned off.

Tablets for video calls are difficult to come by in all four facilities. In DC Unit I, three men reported that they have two tablets available for the 40 men in their dormitory. In DC Unit G, six men stated that there are four tablets for the 79 men in their dormitory. In DC Unit C, one woman reported that tablets for video calls are available "if you can get to them first."

In PICC Unit G, a resident commented that fights break out between people trying to get access to the limited number of tablets for video calls. A man in PICC Unit J reported that they just obtained access to tablets for video calls after four months without access.



Thirty-eight people we interviewed across the four facilities reported problems with sending and receiving mail. In DC Unit G, one man reported waiting for 16 letters and stated that it takes two weeks for their mail to be picked up from the unit for delivery. In DC Unit I, one man reported there is no mailbox to put letters in at all. In PICC Unit J, one man reported "the mail has been horrible, I don't even get legal mail." He stated that the mail is put in the central control area of the unit (i.e. "bubble") and after a couple of days, it is thrown in the trash. In Mod-3, one woman reported they are "lucky if you get a Christmas card in August."

Little Access to Books, In-Cell Activities

Twenty-nine people we interviewed across the four facilities reported a complete lack of in-cell activities to keep themselves occupied. This is an issue we have previously reported on in-depth. One woman in DC Unit C, when asked what in-cell activities she has access to, said "nothing, can't even get a fucking book. I pretty much just stare at the wall." When we posed the same question to a man in PICC Unit J, he responded "nothing, we don't get nothing." In PICC Unit G, one man reported "we can't get the law library at all. (I) Haven't been in my whole 14 months."

Lack of Counseling Services

Forty-four people across all four facilities reported an inability to access Social Service Work Case Managers. According to the inmate handbook, page 26, "Your Social Service Work Case Manager visits his/her assigned housing unit(s) every day."

In PICC Unit J, one man stated "the other week I was surprised (that) the social worker came around. It was the first time she was here in (the) six months since I ('ve) been here." Another man in that unit said that the case managers usually collect visit request slips from the box at the front of the unit and leave without providing a response or services. In PICC Unit G, one man reported that the case manager collects request slips and usually writes back a response, but that they do not visit incarcerated people directly or make rounds of the housing units.

In DC, two men in Unit I reported several month delays before their requests to see a case manager were honored. In DC Unit G, six men said that they had not seen the case manager or chaplain in two months, adding "they never come around," a sentiment repeated in two other group interviews there. Another man in that unit alleged that he had been asked by staff to sign a form confirming that a case manager visited him, when in reality they had not.

In DC Unit C, one woman reported that she had just seen a case manager after waiting 16 days, but that it was a mental health specialized case manager which she had not requested, and they were unable to address her concerns.



In ASD, one woman reported that the box of visit request slips to see the case manager is full. She believes the case manager has left her job because no one has seen her.

In contrast, one woman we spoke with in the mental health unit of Mod-3 said that the case managers come to the unit regularly and "both are great." This was the only person we interviewed who reported access to or positive experience with counseling services.

Limited Access to Cleaning Supplies, Showers, and Laundry

With the notable exception of Mod-3, every person we interviewed reported that they could not get cleaning supplies.

In DC Unit I, two men asked our group to inspect the bottles of cleaning spray perched on the windowsills of their dormitory. We observed that the bottles were empty. The two men stated that prison staff had placed the bottles there just before our visit to hide the reality that cleaning supplies are not made available.

Twenty-seven people in single and double cell units reported an inability to shower consistently. In PICC Unit J, one man reported being allowed out of his cell for ten minutes every three days and only to shower. He stated that he "has to beg for toilet paper and soap." Another man in the same unit reported showering daily in the past week, but previously only being allowed to shower every nine days. In PICC Unit G, a man described limited out of cell time forcing him to choose between using the phone to call his family or take a shower. This was an issue raised in multiple interviews in non-dormitory units, where limited out of cell time results in restricted access to showers.

In the dormitory units at DC and ASD, people reported access to showers. However, many times the showers were described as broken or unusable. At DC Unit I two men stated "it's disgusting. We don't have the right cleaning supplies to clean the shower. There's mildew, there's scum. The knob is broken and taped up." In DC Unit C, three women described the showers as filthy and said there were hardly any cleaning materials. In DC Unit G, a group that we interviewed reported that one of the two showers available for 40 men was broken.

In ASD, one woman we interviewed in the dormitory unit, said that she can shower anytime she wants and "they're very clean. (There is) always access to soap, tampons, and pads if you need them." Another woman from the same unit reported that two of the four showers for 40 women were broken.



Laundry is another hygiene-related issue that was raised across all four facilities, with sixteen people reporting problems. In Mod-3, one woman complained that there were no clean sheets issued to new arrivals in the unit. In DC Unit C, three women complained about a lack of laundry, reporting "we've been here weeks in the same jumpers (i.e., uniforms)." In PICC Unit G, one man reported "they haven't given us linen exchange since I been here four months. Haven't had blues (i.e., uniforms) either. I wash my own underwear in the sink." DC Unit G, one man stated "I can't even remember the last time (they changed linens). Same sheets for months." Another man in that unit reported cleaning his clothes in his sink. In DC Unit I, one man reported getting clothing laundry once per week but having waited three weeks for fresh linens.

Vermin Infestations

In DC and PICC, 27 people reported the presence of mice, rats, roaches, and snakes. This issue was not reported in our prior walkthroughs. In DC Unit G, two men showed our group how they store their food in plastic bags high off the floor to prevent rodents from eating it. In DC Unit I, three men reported this issue; one stating "Mice be climbing on ya." In ASD, one woman we spoke to reported that when she was in DC in August 2021, she frequently saw mice and rats and she received treatment for a rodent bite. Another woman in ASD reported that when she was in DC Unit C, there were "tons of roaches, and Jurassic Park size mice." In DC Unit C, three women reported that they had seen mice, roaches, and snakes. Another woman in that unit described having to stuff her towel around the base of her cell door to prevent rats from entering. In PICC Unit G, one man reported seeing mice and snakes. In PICC Unit J, one man reported "mice be running all around in here, roaches too." Prison Society staff observed mice and cockroach-like bugs in February at PICC when facilitating our parenting class for incarcerated fathers.

No Refunds When Commissary Requests are Not Fulfilled

Forty-one people across all four facilities reported paying for commissary items and not receiving them nor receiving a refund. In DC Unit G, six men reported that the machine that reads commissary slips is broken. They stated that it takes money off their accounts but only half of the orders are fulfilled. Four men in another section of the same housing unit reported the same issue. In DC Unit G, there were a variety of negative comments when asked about commissary services such as: "sucks" "no refunds (for unfulfilled orders)" and "hit or miss." One man in that unit stated that he had filed five separate grievances about lost commissary bags. Three men in DC Unit I had similar complaints.



In PICC Unit J, one man reported "they keep taking money off books but (we) never get our stuff."

In ASD, one woman reported "Everything's sold out. Credit disappears from your account after a purchase, they can only fulfill part of it, say (you have) credit for the rest, but it doesn't get to the account." In Mod-3, another woman shared similar complaints.

Recommendations

Almost every recommendation we shared from the June CFCF walkthrough and September RCF walkthrough is applicable to what we observed in ASD, Mod-3, DC, and PICC. As we stated in the earlier memoranda,

Hiring and training new staff is a key component to addressing the issues identified. But hiring is a long-term process and conditions inside the facility need to improve immediately. Bringing on new staff is a necessary but not sufficient condition for solving the humanitarian crisis in Philadelphia's prison system.

What follows are a list of recommendations that are actionable even with a staffing shortage. We also encourage the city to explore temporary, emergency staffing solutions such as asking the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PA DOC) for temporary staff or loaning administrative staff from other city departments to perform functions like picking up mail.

THE NEED FOR LEADERSHIP

The current crisis is the confluence of staffing problems, physical plant and management issues, and, in our view, an unnecessarily large census of incarcerated people. These problems do not rest with one agency, one branch of government, or even one level of government. Likewise, the numerous steps that could help ease this crisis cut across state and city authority, court and executive branch action. The Prison Society recommends that state and city officials of all three branches of government consider appointing a dedicated leader tasked with ending this humanitarian crisis.

In addition to this overarching recommendation, we provide the following specific suggestions, most of which were articulated in our two previous memoranda. When a recommendation is new, we have highlighted it in bold.



LOCKED IN CELLS FOR EXTENDED PERIODS / NO STAFF SUPERVISION AT NIGHT

- Procedures should be put in place to create consistency in how many people are being let out of their cells and which people are let out when. The Department of Prisons can address the current inconsistency, which leads some people to go days without being let out, while it continues to hire more officers and works to provide three hours of daily out of cell time for nonquarantined units.
- Staff should be assigned and present inside each housing unit, 24 hours a day.
- Staff distribution should be prioritized so that calls for help or rings from an incell buzzer are always responded to.
- The buzzer system should be tested system wide and repaired.

LIMITED ACCESS TO PHONES AND VIDEO VISITS; DELAYS IN MAIL

- Implement and supervise a system for equitable tablet and phone access in each unit. This can be a simple sign-up sheet with time limits.
- Repair broken phones. Purchase a supply of backup tablets consistent with the rate of damage to ensure rapid replacement and continuity of services.
- Audit current procedures for sending and delivering mail to housing units in order to identify and remedy delays. Institute daily mail pick-up.

LITTLE ACCESS TO BOOKS, IN-CELL ACTIVITIES

Provide daily activities that can be conducted while in a cell, such as books, puzzles, or ebooks. Approaches to consider include:

- Providing ebooks, games, and other programing on the GTL prison tablets, similar to what Allegheny County, Berks County, and the PA DOC have done. To do this equitably, Philadelphia would need to purchase enough tablets to enable every resident to have a few hours with a tablet each day. These tablets will have use well beyond the pandemic. If possible, Philadelphia may wish to consider an alternative tablet provider that has more extensive educational programming at less cost to the incarcerated patron.
- Weekly distribution of hard-copy activity books or magazines, similar to the puzzle books the Prison Society donated to the Department of Prisons at the Prison Society's expense earlier this fall.
- o Resumption of library and law library access.



LACK OF COUNSELING SERVICES

- Identify and address hurdles to getting requests for services processed and responded to in a reasonable timeframe.
- Closely review and monitor the completion of daily housing unit visits by assigned Social Service Case Managers.
- Expedite hiring for any Social Service Case Manager vacancies.

LIMITED ACCESS TO CLEANING SUPPLIES, SHOWERS, AND LAUNDRY

- Immediately increase distribution and access to cleaning supplies.
- Ensure that linens and other laundry are being washed on a weekly basis as required by the inmate handbook, Section II, page 13.
- Institute a quarterly maintenance inspection and repair schedule for all showers in the prison.

VERMIN INFESTATIONS

- Order immediate inspection by pest control of all State Road facilities, beginning with DC.
- Increase pest control inspection and remediation schedules and assign administrative staff to regularly review completion of pest control measures.

NO REFUNDS WHEN COMMISSARY REQUESTS ARE NOT FULFILLED

- The prison should immediately audit commissary orders and provide refunds for all items not received.
- The prison should restock commissary on a more regular basis.

CLEARLY INSTRUCT STAFF NOT TO COVER-UP PROBLEMS

- Instruct staff at roll-call not to ask people in custody to falsify logs.
- Instruct staff to refrain from covering-up issues prior to external walkthroughs, e.g. the placement of empty cleaning spray bottles in DC to give the impression of access to cleaning supplies.

Thank you once again for facilitating these walkthroughs. As always, we look to be a partner in addressing the issues raised and working toward better outcomes for all our city's residents. We look forward to scheduling another walkthrough in March.

We would appreciate a written response to this memorandum within two weeks of receipt. Thank you for this opportunity to be of service.



ⁱ Greg Vrato, Philadelphia Department of Prisons, Chief of Staff Jim Engler, Mayor's Chief of Staff Tumar Alexander, Managing Director Vanessa Garrett Harley, First Deputy Managing Director Members of City Council Rebecca Rhynhart, Controller Diana Cortes, City Solicitor Larry Krasner, District Attorney Keisha Hudson, Chief Defender Alexander DeSantis, Inspector General Idee Fox, President Judge, Court of Common Pleas Lisette Shirdan-Harris, Administrative Judge, Court of Common Pleas Joffie Pittman, Supervising Judge, Municipal Court Lucretia Clemons, Supervising Judge of Criminal Trials Patrick Dugan President Judge, Municipal Court Philadelphia Prison Advisory Board Office of Governor Wolf Philadelphia members of the Pennsylvania Legislature Josh Shapiro, Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General Ilana Eisenstein DLA Piper Thomas Greishaw, PA DOC



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Blanche Carney, MSS, CCM Commissioner

March 16, 2022

Claire Shubik-Richards Executive Director Pennsylvania Prison Society 230 S. Broad St., Suite 605 Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Ms. Shubik-Richards,

I am writing in response to your March 1 letter concerning the Philadelphia Department of Prisons (PDP). Your letter is based on your tours of the Alternative & Special Detention Central Unit (ASD) & Modular 3 (Mod 3), Detention Center (DC) and Philadelphia Industrial Correctional Center (PICC) facilities in the fall of 2021. I now respond to your letter accordingly.

In your letter, you raise the following issues based on allegations made by incarcerated people you and/or your staff spoke with during your tours: lack of staff supervision with limited time out of cell, limited access to phones, limited access to poor quality video calls, little access to programming, books and in cell activities, limited access to cleaning supplies and showers, limited access to clean laundry, vermin infestations—particularly at DC, delays in the delivery of mail, no refunds when commissary requests are not fulfilled, and staff asking incarcerated people to falsify logs.

I address the broad allegations regarding out of cell time first. We track this issue on a daily basis across the PDP facilities, and our information conflicts with the generalized complaints raised by way of your letter. As I have done in previous letters, I continue to urge you to provide the specific name/PP# of incarcerated individuals you speak with, along with their specific allegation and housing unit, so that the allegation can be properly investigated and addressed, if substantiated. Instead, as your letter only provides broad allegations, I can only respond in kind. To that end, regarding the complaint of staffing shortage and lack of time out of cell at the PICC facility, our review of our generated data revealed concerns

about the amount of time that individuals in that facility were getting out of cell around the time of your visit last fall. While the provided hours exceeded constitutional minimums, it is our goal to exceed those wherever possible. To that end, I strategically assigned a recently graduated class of cadets to PICC, and the individuals incarcerated at that facility have, as a result of this assignment, experienced significant increases in out of cell time since the time of your tour.

Similarly, our records suggest that the reports you relay are not well founded. Contrary to the blanket allegations made, our records show that the incarcerated population has been receiving increased out of cell time, and has continued to have ample access to toilet paper, cleaning supplies, consistent use of laundry, showers and phone calls. By way of example, regarding video calls, there have been over 500,000 video calls made since family/friends video visitation was implemented. We have sufficient tablets to ensure that all incarcerated people on a housing unit are able to use them for video calls. We routinely monitor the quality of video calls, any glitches that there have been in video or audio quality have been quickly addressed.

Regarding the claim of vermin infestation, we have a contract in place at all facilities for weekly inspections by an exterminator. Regarding claims that commissary refunds are not being fulfilled, we will continue our ongoing monitoring of the commissary system. However, any incarcerated person who experiences any trouble with the commissary system is urged to file a grievance, and, if warranted, the matter is promptly resolved. As for claims of mail delay, I again urge that grievances be filed so that specific claims can be investigated and addressed.

The allegation of staff asking incarcerated people to falsify logs is of acute importance. I especially urge that names/PP#s be provided for any incarcerated individual making this allegation, along with facility, housing unit and the name of staff allegedly involved, so that the allegation can be properly investigated and addressed. As described above, that information is utilized in our strategic staffing decisions, and its validity is important.

Lastly, I should note that it is my hope that the increased activity at the First Judicial District, and increased volume of cases being heard, will start to have a beneficial effect across the PDP facilities. Thanks to our continued collaboration with, the Philadelphia Department of Health, the FJD now permits individuals on quarantined housing units to attend court if they have sequential negative rapid test results. While the Omicron surge has abated, during its height significant numbers of people were not permitted entry to the courthouse. Thankfully the abatement of Omicron and the new testing protocol have permitted resumption of greater numbers of cases. While the average pretrial detention increased substantially during the pandemic, it is my hope that increased court activity will start to decrease length of stay in PDP facilities, which, in turn, should reduce the number of people incarcerated at PDP.

PDP has certainly experienced the challenges faced by carceral settings across the country during this pandemic. Even in the face of these challenges, addressing and resolving issues impacting operations remains a top priority as we work towards resuming full operations while mitigating the spread of Covid-19 within the PDP facilities.

Please be assured that I will continue to evaluate your recommendations carefully.

Sincerely,

Blanche Carney, MSS, CCM

Commissioner

cc: Tumar Alexander, Managing Director

Vanessa Garrett-Harley, First Deputy Managing Director

James Engler, Mayor's Chief of Staff

Members of City Council

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Rebecca Rynhart, Controller

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Idee Fox, President Judge, Court of Common Pleas

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