



PENNSYLVANIA
PRISON SOCIETY
justice & compassion

To: Commissioner Blanche Carney
From: Claire Shubik-Richards, Pennsylvania Prison Society Executive Director
Regarding: RCF Prison Tour, September 9th, 2021
Date: October 5, 2021

Copied:

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Thank you for arranging the Pennsylvania Prison Society's walkthrough of the Riverside Correctional Facility (RCF) on September 9, 2021. We greatly appreciated your team's time and the open communication with senior staff.

The severe problems which we observed in June at CFCF persist including:

- Lack of staff supervision while people spend 23 hours or longer locked in cells.
- No effective means by which an incarcerated person can alert staff to an emergency like a seizure or assault.
- Heightened violence which several incarcerated people attributed to the stress of being confined almost continuously to a small cell.

- No in-person family visits, even though limited family visiting has resumed in much of the state.
- 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 medical care and counselling.
- Limited access to cleaning supplies and showers.
- Failure to follow process and policy for use of segregation (i.e. solitary confinement).
- Problems with the formal grievance system.
- Concerns regarding the safety of the newly installed slide bolt locks.

We have organized this memo into two sections:

The first section details our observations from our walkthrough of housing areas and our interviews with thirty-eight men in custody at the facility.

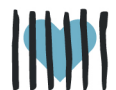
The second section provides recommendations based on our observations and interviews.

Background

The Pennsylvania Prison Society serves as Pennsylvania's independent ombuds and monitor for county and state correctional facilities.

On June 3rd 2021, Prison Society staff and volunteers conducted a walkthrough of Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility (CFCF), including structured interviews with ten men incarcerated there. CFCF was chosen as it is the source of the greatest number of complaints we have received from State Road. We subsequently issued a memorandum summarizing the walkthrough, our observations, and recommendations for ameliorative action.

On September 9th, 2021, Prison Society Executive Director Claire Shubik-Richards, Prison Monitoring Director Noah Barth, and volunteer Andrea Striepen participated in a multi-hour walkthrough of RCF, escorted by Deputy Commissioner Clark, Deputy Warden Lacombe, and Chief of Staff Vrato. Supervising and line staff greeted and spoke with us at the different areas visited. We toured intake, C Unit (segregation), E Unit, and F Unit. We spoke with 38 incarcerated men from these three housing units. In C Unit, we conducted 11 individual interviews at the men's cell



doors. In E Unit and F Unit we conducted interviews in small groups of 3-8 men in the common areas of the housing units. In E Unit we conducted 17 total interviews, in F Unit we conducted ten total interviews. Our staff escorts brought us to all sections of the facility that we requested, gave us time and privacy to speak with people in custody, and answered most of our questions.

I. Observations from the September 9th walkthrough and interviews

Most of the issues reported in our previous memorandum and subsequent communication appear to persist at RCF.

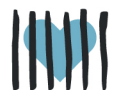
Locked in Cells for Extended Periods Without Staff Supervision.

In C Unit, which houses individuals in segregation, the majority of the 11 men we interviewed reported being let out of their cell one or two times a week, with one man reporting that he had not been let out for the last eight days. All 11 stated they spend at least 48 hours in a cell before being allowed out. This stands in contrast to state regulation 37 Pa. Code § 95.238.

In E Unit, ten out of 17 men interviewed reported that they have less than three hours a daily out their cell as required by *Remick v. City of Philadelphia* 2:20-cv-01959-BMS. One man in E unit reported going days without leaving his cell.

Men in both E and F informed us that days before our walkthrough their units had been on “medical lockdown” because a nurse who had been on the units tested positive for COVID-19. These men stated that during the “lockdown” they were not tested for COVID-19, that legal visits were cancelled, and movement was severely restricted.

In our [previous memorandum regarding CFCE](#) we reported about a man having an asthma attack at night. He stated that he repeatedly rang an in-cell buzzer and banged on the door to get staff assistance, but no staff responded. Twenty-one men at RCF reported that staff do not respond to the in-cell buzzers. One man stated: “They turn off the buzzer, so they don’t get an alert. Last night someone fell out and had to bang on the door to get help.” Another man stated, “You can ring it anytime—maybe in the morning but after that, no one answers.” A man in C Unit reported “Yesterday a guy had a seizure and busted his head open. He was in there bleeding for hours before they responded. They’re supposed to answer buzzing, they’re not responding.” Another man in the C Unit reported the same incident and a lack of response from staff despite multiple men pressing their buzzers.



While in F Unit we asked Deputy Commissioner Clark for a demonstration of the buzzers so we could understand how they function. The officer on duty explained to us that the buzzer rings to a specific phone at the officer's desk on the unit. The Deputy Commissioner then had a correctional officer ring the buzzer from two different cells to demonstrate how the system works. The relevant phone at the officer's desk did not ring. The officer examined the phone, and we conducted another test and again there was no ring. The staff provided no explanation for the problem. The staff did, however, show us that the phone at the officer's desk could call into the cells and function as an intercom for the officer to speak to the incarcerated people.

Violence

In our walkthrough of CFCF, one reflected on the impact of being in a small cell with a cellmate for 22-23 hours a day stating, "When we come out, people are ready to fight."

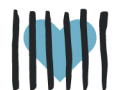
We heard similar reports in RFC. Twenty-three men at RCF reported persistent fights in the prison. As one man explained, "they fight all the time. It's just backed up negative experience and frustration of being locked in a cell."

Twelve men we spoke with reported incidents of assault by corrections officers, one stated "Guards is jumping on people man!" Another man described an incident when a correctional officer sprayed a naked man head to toe with pepper spray for not coming out of the shower fast enough. Two of the men we spoke to provided the name of an officer they claimed assaulted them and details of the incident. We will be following up with the Department about these two incidents under a separate cover.

No In Person Family Visits. Limited Access to Phones and Video Calls.

Unlike the majority of county facilities in Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia Department of Prisons has yet to reopen to family visits.

All the men we spoke with at RCF reported insufficient access to phones and tablets for video visits. Access to both resources is constrained by limited time out of cell and high demand for a small number of phones and tablets. When we asked one man if he was able to access phones, he said "yes, randomly, it's not guaranteed. They only let 50 of us out for an hour, there's ten phones but you got so many things to do." Another man stated, "If you are not in front of the desk as soon as you get out of your cell, you won't get a tablet." Nine men in E Unit and three men in F Unit



stated that correctional officers sometimes cut off all phones and tablets if they are in a bad mood.

In all three of the housing units we visited, we received reports of multiple phones and / or tablets being broken. We were told that one of the two tablets in C Unit, one of the four tablets on E Unit, and two of the four tablets on F Unit are broken. We were told by five men in C Unit that multiple phones are broken. In F Unit, one man said that a phone was recently repaired after a month of being broken.

Like at CFCF, several men at RCF reported poor reception with video calls. One man stated, “bad, it’s poor” and another stated “it’s blurry, they can’t see you.”

Twenty-two men reported significant delays in receiving mail, as long as two weeks. One man in E Unit reported “the lady who comes to get the mail said, ‘I’m not picking it up every day!’”

Little Access to Programming, Books, and In-Cell Activities.

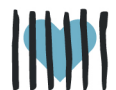
In all three of the housing units we visited, the men consistently reported a dearth of activities to keep themselves occupied. Asked about in-cell activities one man stated “If you got a support system, they can order you books, but that’s it, no games. If you don’t have a support system you’re shit out of luck.” This is compounded by lack of access to the library and law library. One man reported “They won’t let us go to the library. I’ve been two times in the last four months, and I work there!”

Delays in and Denial of Medical Care and Counselling.

In every unit we visited, we heard complaints about delays in obtaining medical care. Two different men, in different units reported having to wait two weeks to have rotten teeth extracted. A man in F Unit explained that when the medical team does respond to a request slip, they come to your cell door to discuss your issue. He said that this can result in medical issues going unaddressed as the person will not want to discuss private issues in front of their cellmate or neighbors.

After a man in C Unit disclosed being diagnosed with hepatitis C and not receiving care, he stated directly: “I’m just frustrated, I’m scared.”

Men in all three units similarly reported a lack of counseling services. Asked about the presence of social workers, one of the men in F Unit stated, “Truthfully speaking they haven’t been down here in months.” Another man in E Unit stated the social worker “comes by once in a blue moon.”



In E Unit a man stated, “The chaplain might stop in once in a while. He tries to do a lot for us but he’s like the only one.” A man from F Unit, who had been at RCF since December stated, “I’ve never seen the Imam,” despite requests for a visit.

Limited Access Cleaning Supplies, and Showers; More Access to Toilet Paper

In all three housing units we visited, men recounted their inability to clean their cells adequately. Five men in E Unit explained that cleaning supplies must be requested during recreation time, but access is subject to the discretion of the officer on duty who may or may not provide them. The man further explained that to use the supplies, they have to use their scarce recreation time, sacrificing their ability to shower and/or make phone calls. In F Unit, three men explained that block workers try to parcel out a latex glove worth of cleaning fluids to each cell to provide some modicum of supply but that this is insufficient to adequately clean. Three men in E Unit reported “We gotta make our own supplies out of our shampoo and rags and stuff.”

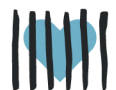
Laundry is also a persistent issue. Five men in E unit reported going over two months without clean uniforms; three men in F Unit reported going a month and a half without clean uniforms. Three block workers explained that they have the access and time to do laundry with machines located on the block, but most officers will not permit them to do so and will not provide an explanation. One man we spoke with in C Unit stated that he hadn’t received clean sheets since April.

In our previous memorandum we reported “Unprompted, men in B1 and C1 both spoke about a lack of toilet paper. In C1, two men explained that each pair of cellmates is issued one roll per week. They stated that the roll typically runs out by the end of the week and, as a result, a black market has developed with incarcerated people buying toilet paper from one another.” No one that we spoke to at RCF brought up toilet paper on their own accord. In F Unit we asked four men about access to toilet paper. They reported that they receive two rolls a week and that sometimes it runs out before the end of the week.

In addition to the above issues which mirror the issues we raised after our walkthrough of CFCF, we would like to share several additional observations from RCF

Failure to Follow Process and Policy for Use of Segregation

Nine of the 11 men we spoke to in C Unit reported not receiving an Inmate Misconduct Report (“write up”) or Disciplinary Hearing as outlined in the inmate handbook, section IV on pages 33-34. One man in C Unit reported “Everybody back



here never had a hearing. None of us have had a punitive hearing since January. We don't have write-ups; we don't have a charge."

Problems with the Grievance System

Men in all three units reported issues with the formal grievance system. In E Unit, one man stated "There's no grievances being answered. I filed three grievances in the last six months and none of them have been responded to." One man in C Unit reported "I got tons of grievance slips but no responses."

Slide Locks

On our walkthrough we were able to see and discuss the sliding-bolt locks that have been installed on the outside of cells in RCF where the pre-existing lock is a type that can reportedly be disabled. We were informed that these sliding-bolt locks are a temporary solution and that will be replaced in a year or so when new permanent, specialized door locks have been fabricated.

Several men at RCF expressed concern that these sliding-bolt locks may present a safety hazard because cells could not be unlocked quickly in the case of an emergency. The Prison Society has also received a handful of calls from family members concerned about this issue as well.

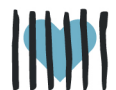
As you are aware, we brought this issue to the attention of Acting Licenses and Inspections Commissioner DiPietro on September 15th. We look forward to hearing back from Commissioner DiPietro so that we can let incarcerated people and their families know if this is, in fact, a safety concern.

II. Recommendations to Consider

Almost every recommendation we shared from the June CFCF walkthrough is applicable to what we observed three months later in RCF. As we stated in the earlier memorandum,

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. When faced with staffing shortages early in the pandemic, the PA DOC brought in the national guard and received an appropriation to hire temporary staff.

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 to tasked with ending this humanitarian crisis.

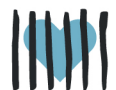
In addition to this overarching recommendation, we provide the following specific suggestions, most of which were articulated in our July memorandum regarding CFCF. When a recommendation is new, we have highlighted it in bold.

LOCKED IN CELLS FOR EXTENDED PERIODS WITHOUT STAFF SUPERVISION.

- Staff distribution should be prioritized so that calls for help or rings from an in-cell buzzer are always responded to.
- **It appears that the in-cell call buzzer system may be disabled or broken system wide. The buzzer system should be tested system wide and repaired.**
- 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 comply with the three hours of daily out of cell time for non-quarantined units required by *Remick v. City of Philadelphia* 2:20-cv-01959-BMS.

NO IN-PERSON FAMILY VISITS. LIMITED ACCESS TO PHONE AND VIDEO CALLS.

- Philadelphia should join the more than 19 Pennsylvania counties allowing in-person, non-contact family visits. This May, we shared a [set of recommendations](#) for resuming visiting at county prisons. These



recommendations, based on current CDC guidance, public health experts, and best practices from across the country, include:

- Conducting verbal screenings and temperature checks of all visitors at point of entry;
- Requiring visitors and incarcerated persons wear face masks throughout the visit; and
- Starting with non-contact and, where possible, outdoor visits that include social distancing.
- Prioritizing vaccinated people in custody and vaccinated family.

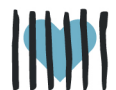
Many of the counties that have prioritized in person family visits have done so cautiously and with the protective measures listed, even while vaccination rates among the incarcerated population remains lower than the overall county.

- 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.
- Improve video visiting quality. The City Council, Mayor's Office, and the Managing Director's Office would never put-up with the video quality experienced by Philadelphians in custody and their families. Unlike members of city government, Philadelphians in custody have no other means to see their loved ones.
- 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 PROGRAMMING, BOOKS, IN-CELL ACTIVITIES.

We were pleased to have collaborated with the Philadelphia Department of Prisons to distribute 2,200 Prison Society-purchased puzzle books to people incarcerated in CFCF. These books were provided to the Prisons on July 2nd. While these activity books will help with mental engagement temporarily, there needs to be a more sustained approach to the lack of 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 programming 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
- Resumption of library and law library access.
- Establish and share a clear timeline for full resumption of programming from external volunteers and program providers.

DELAYS IN ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE AND COUNSELING.

- Identify what is causing the current wait times for medical care and then work with the prison's healthcare team to shorten wait-times.
- Work with the prison's healthcare team to develop a plan to triage all outstanding medical requests.
- Likewise, identify and address hurdles to getting requests for counselling and chaplaincy services processed and responded to in a reasonable timeframe.

LIMITED ACCESS TO TOILET PAPER, CLEANING SUPPLIES, AND SHOWERS.

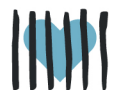
- Immediately increase access to cleaning supplies.
- Ensure that linens and other laundry are being washed on a weekly basis as required by the inmate handbook, Section II, page 13.
- Institute a quarterly maintenance inspection and repair schedule for all showers in the prison.
- Spot-check that two rolls of toilet paper are being provided every week to each person incarcerated on State Road.

FAILURE TO FOLLOW PROCESS AND POLICY IN SEGREGATION

- Conduct a comprehensive case review of everyone in segregation and immediately hold disciplinary hearings for anyone who has not yet received one.

PROBLEMS WITH THE GRIEVANCE SYSTEM

- Audit and explore a revision of the current grievance system to ensure timely responses.

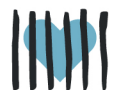


- Hire a temporary consultant with corrections expertise to review the grievance backlog and develop a plan for responding to all grievances within the next 60 days.

It is the Prisons Society's intention that this memorandum will be of assistance to the policy makers of Philadelphia. We are a partner in working towards a more just and humane prison system. We believe that the walkthrough conducted on September 9th was of mutual benefit to the prison's administration and residents.

Thank you for facilitating this walkthrough, and for facilitating our September 28th walkthrough of the Detention Center, ASD, and Mod-3. We look forward to our upcoming walkthrough of the Philadelphia Industrial Correctional Center (PICC).

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





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Blanche Carney, MSS, CCM
Commissioner

October 26, 2021

Claire Shubik-Richards
Executive Director
Pennsylvania Prison Society
230 South Broad Street, Suite 605
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Ms. Shubik-Richards,

I am writing in response to your October 5th letter. Your letter is based on your September 9, 2021 tour of the Riverside Correctional Facility (RCF). I will address each of the sections of your letter in turn below.

The first section of your letter is entitled "[l]ocked in cells for extended periods without staff supervision." Your first concern within this section is based on interviews with inmates housed on an administrative/punitive segregation unit in RCF. As you know, inmates housed on segregation units, due to the security concerns which necessitate them to be housed there, are not permitted the same out of cell time as inmates in general population. That being said, we strive to ensure that segregation inmates receive daily out of cell time while ensuring compliance with the staff ratios required by the security status of those incarcerated persons.

You also refer to inmates on a general population unit stating that they do not receive court mandated three (3) hours of daily out of cell time. Again, we strive to ensure there is compliance with court mandated time out of cell on a daily basis. Our records tracking the provision of out of cell time show that we are substantially in compliance with the out of cell time requirements imposed by the federal court in the *Remick* litigation.

Regarding the report of medical hold without associated Covid-19 testing, the PDP protocol to identify Covid-19 and reduce the risk of its transmission is as follows. When an individual presents as symptomatic, that individual's housing unit is placed on quarantine (or "medical hold") during the pendency of the symptomatic individual's Covid-19 test. If the results of that first test are negative, the housing unit is released from quarantine without testing the

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remainder of the unit. If the results are positive, the entire unit remains on quarantine while the serial testing protocol is run.

You raise a concern about in-cell buzzers not working. Please be assured that we have been conducting a review of the operation of our in-cell buzzers and the connection to the officer's console throughout our facilities. We are fixing any connection issues that are found during this review. Most importantly, we have always stressed continual touring and observation by housing unit officers so that there will be proper response to any need for assistance that arises in a particular cell. To the extent that the individuals with whom you spoke can identify a specific date and time of the non-response they described, we can investigate that further.

Your next section is entitled "[v]iolence." In this section, you refer to inmates reporting "persistent fights." Unfortunately, fights do happen in a prison setting. We make every effort to prevent incidents from occurring. However, when incidents do occur our staff quickly respond, deescalate and bring the situation under control. Within this section, you also refer to allegations which, if true, would certainly constitute unnecessary force by staff. You state that you will be providing details separately so that those allegations can be investigated. That is appreciated, as I always stress needing names and PP#s so that specific allegations can be properly investigated.

Your next section is entitled "[n]o in person family visits. [l]imited access to phones and video calls." It needs to be noted that well over 350,000 video visits have been made by our inmates since we began tablet video visits in October 2020. We have sufficient tablets to ensure that all inmates on a housing unit are able to use them for video calls. If a tablet is broken, it needs to be reported to the housing unit officer so that it can be addressed. We routinely audit the quality on video calls and will continue to do so in light of the issue you have raised regarding poor quality. Any glitches that there have been in video or audio quality have been quickly addressed. As for in-person family visits, we will be following a strategic, phased approach in returning to in-person civilian visits, to best protect the health of our staff, inmates and visitors. We must continue to exercise the same caution which has provided a far lower Covid-19 infection rate at the PDP than most other correctional facilities locally and nationwide.

Your next section is entitled "[d]elays in and denial of medical care and counseling." This section first contains allegations of inmates not receiving a response for medical care. Our sick call slip and medical grievance process is effective for addressing lack of medical care. Regarding the inmates you mention, please provide their names and PP#s separately and I will ensure that their issue is addressed promptly while investigating the cause of delay. This section also contains allegations of neither Social Workers or Chaplains visiting the unit. Religious and social services are being timely provided, but I will ensure that these services are monitored accordingly. As I

always request, please separately provide the names of those inmates who have complained of lack of services so that it may be investigated and swiftly addressed.

Your next section is entitled “[l]imited access to cleaning supplies and showers; more access to toilet paper.” Within this section, you summarize complaints of lack of toilet paper, access to cleaning supplies, and not being able to clean laundry. As I have responded previously, our records indicate that every inmate has ample access to toilet paper and cleaning supplies, and consistent use of laundry.

The next section of concern is entitled “[f]ailure to follow process and policy for use of segregation.” This section refers to several inmates reporting to you that they have not received write-ups or hearings for misconducts. We have staff assigned to continuously administrate and oversee the disciplinary hearing process for inmate misconducts. That being said, we will review the process regarding write-ups and disciplinary hearings for inmate misconducts to make sure that it is being properly facilitated.

The penultimate section of concern is entitled “[p]roblems with the grievance system.” In this section, you refer to particular inmates alleging that they had filed several grievances with no response. We continuously monitor our grievance system throughout our facilities to ensure that there are timely responses to all grievances filed. In light of your concern, we will certainly review the grievance response process to ensure timely responses.

Your last section of concern is “[s]lide locks.” As you know, you previously raised a concern upon first learning of this temporary measure. I am glad you were able to see these slide bar locks in person on your tour. As stated previously, these slide bars are in response to the many incidents of inmates compromising their cell door locks by stuffing trash and debris inside of the locking mechanism. They are a temporary mechanism to provide safety for staff and inmates, as serious bodily injury could occur if inmates who compromise their door lock are able to pop out of their cells and attack fellow inmates or staff. Contrary to being a fire hazard, the slide bar mechanism allows staff to quickly open cell doors in the event of an emergency. As previously discussed, we have contracted with a vendor to replace the lock mechanism at PICC maximum side and have initiated the procurement process for lock mechanism replacement for RCF. The new lock mechanisms will be installed accordingly. We are doing all we can to expedite the procurement of the new locks, but as with many goods/services nationwide, we are experiencing supply chain challenges.

Following your concerns, you propose a series of “recommendations to consider.” I will not address your recommendations in detail, but please be assured that I will evaluate them carefully for ideas that could be helpful in addressing our issues during these times.

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In closing, as you are aware, I do not control our census. However, I will continue to work with our criminal justice partners in seeking safe methods to reduce the prison population. I have continued to champion all means possible to get inmates transported to court and have their cases heard, in addition to cases being heard in our own courtroom at the Detention Center. I remain hopeful that we will see a continued decrease in our population, which will help in maximizing the efficiency of prison operations.

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
Diana Cortez, City Solicitor
Alan Tauber, Interim Defender
Larry Krasner, District Attorney
Rebecca Rynhart, Controller
Alexander DeSantis, Inspector General
Philadelphia Members of the Pennsylvania Legislature
Illana Eisenstein and Joe Baker, DLA Piper



Blanche Carney
Commissioner
Department of Prisons
City of Philadelphia

Via email

November 8th, 2021

Dear Commissioner Carney:

Thank you for your October 26th response to our memorandum regarding our September 9th walkthrough of Riverside Correctional Facility (RCF) during which we toured the women's intake area, visited three housing units, and confidentially interviewed 38 men.

We are heartened to read that you are looking into several of the issues we identified from our walkthrough. In particular, we appreciate the Department's pledge to:

- Fix the "connection issues" with the in-cell buzzers;
- Review the "process regarding write-ups" for people in segregation; and
- Review the grievance process.

Please let us know the timeframe for each of these reviews and repairs, what these reviews will entail, and if the findings from the reviews will be made public.

Your letter also states that Department of Prisons' records contradict the information shared with the Prison Society during its walkthrough regarding:

- People going days without being let out of their cells;
- Lack of access to cleaning supplies, showers, and laundry;
- Lack of access to toilet paper;
- Inadequate access to tablets and phones; and

- Absence of social workers and chaplains.

Please provide us the various records referred to in your letter. The complaints referenced above were not isolated or infrequent. We heard them repeatedly, and in detail, during our walkthrough of three housing units at RCF in September. These complaints were also not limited to RCF. We heard them from an additional 10 men in three housing units at Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility (CFCF) in June (see our July 13, 2021 memo to you regarding that walkthrough). Given the widespread nature of the complaints among individuals with no means to communicate with each other, we would like to review your records to understand the schism between your paperwork and our first-hand accounts.

Your response also discusses the slide bolts which have been installed at RCF and Philadelphia Industrial Correctional Center (PICC). As we mentioned in our September 15th communication to you and Acting Licenses and Inspections Commissioner DiPietro, our reading of state and city regulations indicate these locks pose a fire hazard. Nothing you write, or our own observations, allay that concern. We look forward receiving the Acting Commissioner's assessment.

We are glad you are taking our findings seriously and looking into issues raised. Bringing these concerns to light is precisely the value we aim to provide the PDP and all prison administrators in Pennsylvania. It is also why the Pennsylvania legislature gave the Prison Society "Official Visitor" status, permitting our members to "enter and visit any correctional institution on any and every day, including Sundays, between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m."

As you are aware, our September 28th walkthrough of Detention Center (DC) was cut short by the scheduling constraints of your staff. A subsequent trip to DC and sufficient access to PICC has thus far been denied.

We take issue with your contention that touring one housing unit at PICC without speaking to groups of men anonymously is sufficient. The credibility and thoroughness of the information we have provided you about conditions at CFCF and RCF could only be achieved with the ability to tour all areas of the facility and to speak to a large number of people from multiple housing units anonymously.

Pursuant to our right under Pennsylvania law, we will conduct a walkthrough of DC and PICC on November 16th from 9:00am-1:00pm. We are serious about fulfilling our duties as the state's prison ombuds and monitor and expect that you and PDP staff will respect our rights under State law.

We will also follow-up with your senior staff to schedule a subsequent visit to check on the reviews currently underway of the in-cell buzzers, and grievance and write-up systems.

Sincerely,



Claire Shubik-Richards
Executive Director

Copied:

Greg Vrato, Philadelphia Department of
Prisons, Chief of Staff
Jim Engler, Mayor's Chief of Staff
Members of City Council
Alan Tauber, Acting Chief Defender
Rebecca Rhynhart, Controller
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
Philadelphia Prison Advisory Board
Prison Society Board of Directors
Dan Jurman, Governor's Office

Tumar Alexander, Managing Director
Vanessa Garrett Harley, First Deputy
Managing Director
Diana Cortes, City Solicitor
Larry Krasner, District Attorney
Josh Shapiro, Pennsylvania Office of
Attorney General
Lucretia Clemons, Supervising Judge of
Criminal Trials
Patrick Dugan President Judge,
Municipal Court
Philadelphia members of the
Pennsylvania Legislature
Ilana Eisenstein DLA Piper
Thomas Greishaw, PA DOC
Alison Jones, Governor's Office