



To: Warden Laura Williams
From: Noah A. Barth, Pennsylvania Prison Society Prison Monitoring Director
Regarding: GWH Prison Tour, December 13, 2022
Date: February 9, 2023
Copied: Delaware County Government Officialsⁱ
Pennsylvania State Department of Corrections
Prison Society Board of Directors

This memorandum summarizes observations from the Prison Society's December 13, 2022, walkthrough of the Delaware County / George W. Hill Correctional Facility (GWH). This walkthrough took place one year after our previous walkthrough on December 7, 2021.

We are pleased to report that many of the issues identified in the 2021 walkthrough have been improved upon, including:

- Significant increases in out of cell time
- Major improvements in the intake area
- Deployment of tablets facility-wide, helping address the previous dearth of activities, and
- Significant improvement in the availability of basic hygiene items.

While we observed marked improvement in multiple areas, the incarcerated people we interviewed raised several outstanding concerns, including:

- Reports of unprofessionalism
- A lack of response to in-cell buzzers
- Significant wait-times for medical care, and
- Lack of financially accessible programming on tablets.

This memo is organized into two sections. The first section details our observations and interviews. The second section provides recommendations.

Background

Since 1787, the Pennsylvania Prison Society has served as Pennsylvania's independent prison monitor for county and state correctional facilities. Authorized

by Pennsylvania statute, Prison Society staff and volunteer Prison Monitors may enter any correctional facility in the Commonwealth and meet privately with incarcerated people.ⁱⁱ This citizen involvement is a crucial tool to ensuring the health, safety, and dignity of people in prison. We appreciate Delaware County's cooperation with the Prison Society in advancing this vital mission.

On December 13, 2022, Prison Society Prison Monitoring Director Noah Barth and three volunteer Prison Monitorsⁱⁱⁱ conducted a multi-hour walkthrough of GWH. They were escorted by Warden Laura Williams and members of her staff.^{iv} The walkthrough included a tour of three housing areas and structured interviews with 29 incarcerated women and men. All interviews were voluntary, anonymous, and interviewees were randomly selected. We interviewed 26 people in general population housing units either one-on-one or in small groups, and three men at one Restricted Housing Unit, "RHU" or "segregation" or "solitary," through one-on-one conversations at their cell doors.^v

This visit follows one year after our previous walkthrough on December 7, 2021. At that time, we raised serious concerns regarding operations and conditions at GWH. In the interceding year GWH has gone through tremendous change with control of the prison transferring from the privately owned GEO Group to direct control by Delaware County, the appointment of Warden Laura Williams, and new contracts for commissary, food, and medical services^{vi}. The Prison Society is greatly encouraged by the progress we observed on our most recent walkthrough.

I. Observations from the December 13 walkthrough and interviews

Out of Cell Time

Twenty-four of the 26 people we asked in general population reported getting out of their cell every day for at least three hours. Most reported being out for the majority of the day. One woman we interviewed reported "we out all day." Another man we interviewed detailed the recreation schedule that added up to nine and half hours of out of cell time daily, adding "before was just two hours." This stands in stark contrast to our previous visit, when every one of the 53 people we interviewed reported being locked in their cells for multiple days at a time.

On this most recent walkthrough, the three people we interviewed in restricted housing reported being allowed out of their cell either every other day, or three times a week, for no more than one hour a day.

Access to Books, In-Cell Activities, and Commissary

Since our visit in 2021, the prison has supplied tablets to all people incarcerated in general population. This is a marked improvement as all 53 people we interviewed in 2021 reported a near total lack of activities with which to keep themselves occupied.



On this most recent walkthrough, several incarcerated people commented on the lack of free programming on the tablets. One said, “if you’re indigent you can’t use the tablet to play games or anything.” Another reported that some men do not even take their tablet when distributed at the start of the day because they know that they can’t afford to use any of the services.

Several people also remarked on the lack of non-tablet activities. One stated “they have a whole gymnasium we never use. I haven’t been there in two years.” Another said, “pretty much the tablets is all we got.”

Law library access has significantly improved since 2021 when all 54 people we interviewed said there was no access. Gaps do remain, however, with eight of the 19 people we asked reporting difficulties. One man stated that staff “only take four (people) once a week. The person down there doesn’t help with anything, she’s unprofessional.” Another man stated “it’s when they feel like it, and if you make the cut.” One woman we interviewed reported “takes a week or two to get down there, I think it depends on when your court date is.”

Although we did not ask specifically, several men in the maximum-security unit we visited reported that they are not allowed to attend religious services. These men showed us a monthly unit rotation schedule that their unit was not on. This was reported to administration who commented that they were unaware of this issue and would address it.

Since our last walkthrough the prison has changed commissary vendors from Keefe to Aramark. The people we interviewed reported a shorter commissary list and higher prices. This is consistent with broader trends in commissary services across the state. The people we interviewed reported receiving prompt refunds for items they ordered that were sold out. This is a significant improvement from 2021 when people we spoke with talked about difficulty getting refunds.

Access to Showers and Hygiene Items

During our 2021 walkthrough we observed how a lack of out of cell time limited access to showers. All of the people we interviewed on this walkthrough reported the ability to shower regularly with the exception of a group of three women who stated that only two of the shower heads in their unit were working, limiting access.

We directly observed an improvement in shower conditions. Shower stalls in all three units we visited were cleaner, better lit, and lacking in the mold we previously observed. There were still minor signs of rust and peeling paint.

People we interviewed reported an increased availability of basic hygiene items like toilet paper and soap but expressed concerns about quality. Regarding prison provided soap, one man said “you use the soap twice and it’s gone.” One woman we



interviewed stated “the soap they pass out fucks up your skin, so we use it to wash clothes.”

Regarding feminine hygiene products, one woman reported receiving “four pads for a week on period... they never have them, they have to go and look for pads each time someone needs them.” The Warden said they are taking this issue seriously and acknowledged limiting the number of pads as women use them for other purposes such as cleaning rags or toilet seat covers- a phenomenon we observed. The Warden stated that complaints about the availability of feminine hygiene products have significantly lowered since she made the option of tampons available.

Staff Supervision

Following our 2021 walkthrough, we reported on a lack of staff presence in housing units. This was not an issue on our most recent visit. There were multiple staff members present and available in all three units we visited, and other others we observed through doorways.

All cells in the units we visited are fitted with in-cell buzzers which allow people locked in cells to alert correctional officers to concerns, including medical emergencies. In 2021 every person we spoke to stated that staff do not respond to the buzzers, and many are broken. This problem persists. In this most recent walkthrough, 17 out of 21 people we asked said that staff rarely or never respond to buzzer rings. One man told us, “None of them work. Someone could be in their cell dying and no one will come.”

Several people also commented on the use of group punishment by corrections officers. One stated “just for one person they might lock the whole unit in for no reason.” A woman we interviewed stated “if one (person) gets in trouble, everybody in trouble. Won’t matter who did what.”

Violence

Last year we heard reports of serious violence from both the incarcerated population and staff, including stabbings and slashings. Four of the people we interviewed in 2021 reported that the dangerous atmosphere was fueled by extended periods locked in cells. While 15 of the 26 people we interviewed in 2022 reported witnessing fights, they did not report the same level of severe violence as was reported in 2021. One man stated “yeah, [fights] happen, it’s jail. Not so bad since they gave us rec back, that’s a blessing.” One woman reported “some, [fights] not all the time.” A man we interviewed in the RHU stated “the officers condone [fighting]. They know it’s going on and even set it up for inmates to get jumped.”

Seven out of 23 people we asked reported witnessing or experiencing staff assault at GWH. One man reported “yeah, we seen that a lot, they abuse their authority a lot.”



Intake Conditions

In our December 2021 visit, we observed extreme overcrowding and unsafe conditions in the intake area. The men we spoke with reported being held in those conditions for a week or longer despite prison policy of processing and housing new arrivals within eight hours.

At that time, we recommended that the prison open a separate intake housing unit with sufficient bed and restroom space. We are pleased that such action has been taken^{vii}. During our December 2022 walkthrough we were pleased to find no crowding and more hygienic conditions at the general intake area.

Unfortunately, intake procedures still lack universal COVID-19 testing.

II. Recommendations to Consider

We are pleased to see the County and prison administrators take decisive action to demonstrably improve conditions in such a short time.

Officials we spoke with credited aggressive recruitment and increased salaries with improving staff morale and service delivery within the prison. Based on the Prison Society's observations, discussions with staff, and interviews of people in custody, we provide the following additional suggestions for Delaware County to consider:

Out of Cell Time

- Ensure all incarcerated individuals are allowed to utilize the gymnasium, yard, and other non-unit recreation space on a regular basis.

Access to Books, In-Cell Activities, and Commissary

- Investigate expansion of free tablet services including educational programming.
- Restore full in-person access to the library and law library.
- Ensure that all units are allowed to attend in-person religious services in line with their faith tradition on a regular basis.
- Investigate partnerships to provide additional in-cell and on unit activities. This can include local libraries, counseling programs, and religious study groups among others.

Staff Supervision

- The in-cell buzzer system may be disabled or broken system-wide. The buzzer system should be tested system-wide and repaired. Periodic spot checks should be conducted throughout the facility to ensure the system is functional.
- Direct staff in writing that they are to discontinue the use of group disciplinary measures.



The Prison Society is greatly encouraged by the progress made in the short time since the deprivitization of GWH, and our last monitoring memorandum on the prison. We believe that this is a testament to not only the hard work of the GWH staff and County administrators, but the importance of independent citizen monitoring. The case of GWH over the past year is a perfect illustration of a locality and the Prison Society working together for the shared goal of a more humane prison, and ultimately a safer community.

We appreciate a written response to this memorandum within two weeks of receipt. We are grateful for this opportunity to be of service and look forward to our continued work in partnership with facility administration and county leadership.

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County council Christine Reuther
President Judge Kevin Kelly
Juvenile Court Judge Rick Lowe
Common Pleas Court Judge John J. Whelan
Common Pleas Court Judge Mary Alice Brennan
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First Assistant Public Defender Lee Awbrey
District Attorney Jack Stollsteimer
First Assistant District Attorney Tanner Rouse
Citizen Appointment Jonathon King
Citizen Appointment Deborah Love
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Alta Management Principal Majid Alsayegh

ⁱⁱ 61 P.S. 3511-3512

ⁱⁱⁱ Bob Cicchinelli, Jennifer Murphy, and Aidan King

^{iv} Program Manager, Criminal Justice and Rehabilitation Resnick, Major Pleasant, Compliance Officer Bowles

^v Unit 10D- men's maximum security; Unit 9D- women's general population; Unit 3B- men's restricted housing. We visited these same three units during our December 7, 2021 walkthrough.

^{vi} Food and commissary are contracted to Aramark. Healthcare is contracted to Wellpath. All other departments have been transitioned to direct county operation.

^{vii} Unit 8A for males; Unit 9B for females





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TO: Noah A. Barth, Pennsylvania Prison Society Prison Monitoring Director
FROM: Warden Laura Williams, George W. Hill Correctional Facility
RE: George W. Hill Prison Tour, December 13, 2022 and Observational Report
DATE: February 23, 2022

The administrative team at George W. Hill Correctional Facility values the dedication of the Pennsylvania Prison Society (the "Prison Society") to support and advocate for consistency, change, and maximizing the positive imprint that correctional facilities have on the incarcerated population and the greater community at large.

On December 13, 2022, members of the Prison Society conducted an on-site review and walkthrough of the facility. Representatives included Prison Society Monitoring Director Noah Barth and volunteer Prison Monitors Bob Cicchinelli, Jennifer Murphy, and Aidan King. During this walkthrough, the representatives interviewed 29 randomly selected voluntary male and female incarcerated persons. Interviews were conducted on 3B, 9D, and 10D. This review was conducted as an update to the previous walkthrough that took place on December 7, 2021, to identify any progress and/or areas of opportunity.

The facility and administration were encouraged with the findings from the Prison Society and the acknowledgment of marked improvements of specific areas such as: significant increases in out-of-cell time, major improvements in the intake area, deployment of tablets facility-wide, and significant improvement in the availability of basic hygiene items. The act of "deprivatization" of the facility was a progressive and positive step for the overall operations of the facility and allows for the county to have increased engagement to improve the environment.

The following responses are being provided to facilitate ongoing conversations and fostering the partnership and relationship with the Prison Society.

The following categories were identified as outstanding concerns raised by the incarcerated population:

1. Reports of unprofessionalism
2. A lack of response to in-cell buzzers
3. Significant wait times for medical care, and
4. Lack of financially accessible programming on tablets.

The following categories were recommended by the Prison Society for consideration and action based on the reports provided from the incarcerated population:

1. Out-of-Cell Time

- a. **Ensure all incarcerated individuals are allowed to utilize the gymnasium, yard, and other non-unit recreation space on a regular basis.**



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- 2. Access to Books, In-Cell Activities, and Commissary**
 - a. Investigate expansion of free tablet services including educational programming.**
 - b. Restore full in-person access to the library and law library.**
 - c. Ensure that all units are allowed to attend in-person religious services in line with their faith tradition on a regular basis.**
 - d. Investigate partnerships to provide additional in-cell and on unit activities. This can include local libraries, counseling programs, and religious study groups among others.**
- 3. Staff Supervision**
 - a. The in-cell buzzer system may be disabled or broken system-wide. The buzzer system should be tested system-wide and repaired. Periodic spot checks should be conducted throughout the facility to ensure the system is functional.**
 - b. Direct staff in writing that they are to discontinue the use of group disciplinary measures.**

These responses are not intended to dismiss or minimize the reports of the incarcerated persons interviewed. The facility also acknowledges the marked improvements and will remain committed to maintaining or sustaining these necessary changes that were observed throughout the visit.

1. Out-of-Cell Time

The recreation yards are permitted to be in-use during periods of out-of-cell time, weather permitting. Due to the constraints of the physical environment, the recreation yard is shared between two housing blocks. Both housing blocks cannot simultaneously share the utilization of the space, but the facility will ensure that there is equity in the availability of the recreation yards.

With support from the Jail Oversight Board and County Council, the facility has procured weather proof activity centers and pull up bars. These are anticipated for delivery to the facility in April of 2023 and will be installed.

As the facility has been able to stabilize and increase staffing, the opportunity for utilizing the facility gymnasium consistently remains as a future goal. The juvenile population has access to the facility gymnasium, whereas a schedule will need revised and implemented for the adult population.



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2. Access to Books, In-Cell Activities, and Commissary

Free Services on Tablets

The facility began implementing 1:1 tablet availability to the full population the week of August 15, 2022. Tablet entertainment services/content are divided into three categories: free, \$0.03/minute, and \$0.05/minute. These prices are posted prior to the individual accessing the content to ensure they are aware of the costs. During the tablet enhancement, Senior Case Management staff was provided a list of all tablet content (both free programs and fee for use programs). A list of free services was sent to the full incarcerated population when they signed on to the tablets and it is also located in the “notices” application on the tablet. Free services include:

- EDOVO Learning – Educational, Vocational, Life Skill, and Reentry programming (includes a discovery search engine to quickly access topics of interest) – has over 200,000 hours of content between 800+ education courses, with new content added monthly
- Lexus Nexus – Law Library/Legal Search Engine
- PREA Resources
- Facility Documentation Application
- Facility Notices Application
- Transfer of Funds to Tablet Account
- Electronic Books (238 free books)
- Religious Library
- Khan Academy and OpenStax Textbooks
- Dictionary
- Calculator

Based on the spontaneous reports from the participants in interviews, a reinforcement and increased communication of available services is necessary to ensure that these free tablet services are able to be accessed. Additional education and notice of available services was provided to the entire population in electronic communication in the “notices” application on the tablets and was sent to each case manager for posting in their respective offices.

Law Library Services

Law library services have always permitted in-person access in the facility. Each housing unit has a bi-weekly schedule in which individuals can sign-up by submitting a request to their case manager for access to the law library for the next scheduled session. Each day (Monday-Friday) the law library maintains in person operations. On August 1, 2022, we increased the number of participants that were able to attend law library services in-person to 10 individuals from each block. The facility will review the current law library schedule to determine if a revision is required to increase the availability of access and services.



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Additionally, the facility has included Lexus Nexus on every tablet for free/daily access to law library materials in order to increase accessibility to the courts. This determination was always meant to support the current in-person practice.

In-Person Religious Services

In-person religious services have been limited throughout the past year while the facility was increasing staffing numbers and revising operational/institutional schedules. Full availability of in-Person faith-based services resumed on December 9th, 2022. A revision to the schedule was required to ensure that all units were offered access to in-person religious services. Our agency has been increasing the volume and capacity of the volunteers throughout the institution.

Increased Partnerships with Community Organizations

George W. Hill endeavors to partner with a multitude of organizations to provide services to our population. Throughout the last year we have engaged higher education partners, skills trade partners, wellness partners, and education partnerships. Focused attempts have resulted in more structured programming being made available to the Juvenile population. Our objective is to ensure that these programs and activities meet the needs/requests of the incarcerated population.

There are a multitude of services and programs presently available to the incarcerated population. George W. Hill staff provides access to secure basic education through either their General Educational Development (GED) or high school diploma. Through partnerships with higher education institutions, some incarcerated persons also have access to college credit courses. These are a select group of individuals and are funded through grant monies that the colleges and universities have secured. The facility currently partners with Widener University for financial literacy courses, Delaware County Community College for Student Success (credits eligible), University of Penn through Goldring Reentry Initiative, and Pennsylvania State University Brandywine Inside Out (credits eligible). Lastly, there are workforce skills training classes that lead to certifications such as "CleanCheck" (certification which offers the incarcerated population training in keeping facilities clean and complaint modeling OSHA compliance training in Bloodborne Pathogen standard and safety module).

Through a facility "town hall" process, the population identified the following areas as their most desired resources: vocational, exercise/meditation/wellness, work/job readiness, and financial literacy. The facility continues to maintain a commitment of increasing availability of resources for the population to assist in their readiness for re-integration.

3. Staff Supervision

In-cell buzzer

Delaware County Jail Oversight Board and County Council have approved contracts that support increasing the safety and security measures within the infrastructure and environment of the facility. Presently, Professional Systems Engineering has been contracted firm to assess the in-



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cell buzzer/communication device throughout the facility. The County and facility is engaging in a competitive bidding process to address the areas of opportunity based on the assessments and needs of the facility.

Group disciplinary measures

It was reported that group disciplinary measures were utilized throughout the facility that resulted in full populations being locked in when one or few individuals were responsible for infractions within the facility. Group disciplinary measures are reserved for significant incidents (i.e. full pod disturbance) and will be exercised in compliance with Title 37 standards to allow for a safe and secure environment. Group disciplinary measures are not a common practice and have occurred on approximately 3 occasions within the 2022 calendar year. Written direction and education will be provided to supervisory staff to reinforce this expectation.

In conclusion, the facility and this administration appreciate the mission of the PA Prison Society and appreciate the time and resources dedicated to reviewing the progress of this institution. We maintain a mutual interest in increasing the standards and integrity of this institution to ensure equitable, humane, and supportive care to those that interact with the criminal justice system and are incarcerated at George W. Hill Correctional Facility. We are exceedingly grateful for the thorough and thoughtful review completed by the PA Prison Society and look forward to future visits and continued advancement towards facility strategic goals.