

PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY

To: Warden Orlando Harper, Allegheny County Jail
From: Claire Shubik-Richards, Executive Director
Noah Barth, Prison Monitoring Director
Regarding: ACJ Prison Experience Quarterly Survey, Summer 2022
Date: December 12, 2022
Copied: William D. McKain, Allegheny County Manager
Erin Dalton, Director Allegheny County Department of Human Services

This memorandum summarizes the Pennsylvania Prison Society's first quarterly Prison Experience Survey of residents at the Allegheny County Jail (ACJ).¹

The Prison Society serves as Pennsylvania's independent monitor for county and state correctional facilities. The Prison Society conducted this survey at the request of the Allegheny County Jail Oversight Board (JOB) and with cooperation and support from the ACJ and the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS). It was distributed via tablet to all individuals in the general population from July 11, 2022 to August 14, 2022. A total of 330 people responded.

Survey respondents identified a number of concerns.

- 95% of respondents reported regularly going hungry due to insufficient portions and/or inedible food.
- 61% of respondents do not feel safe in the jail with 45% having witnessed physical abuse, 25% being the victim of physical abuse by another resident and 19% being the victim of physical abuse by a staff member.
- 76% have seen rodents or rodent droppings in the jail.
- 52% of respondents who requested medical care reported that they had not received care. Of the people who received care, 61% (n= 78 / 128) were dissatisfied with the care they received.

While this memo highlights a number of serious concerns, the survey also reflected several instances of positive management at the ACJ, including:

- 83% of people reported being able to make a phone call at least once a day.

¹ This memo has been edited slightly for publication. The original memo provided to the county included an appendix of all narrative responses to the survey.



- 87% reported the ability to do laundry at least once a week.

Background

This survey was developed and administered by the Prison Society at the request of President Judge Clark, then chair of the (JOB). It grew out of a discussion at the JOB. It was developed in consultation with Judge Clark, Warden Harper, and DHS. DHS provided data collection and coalition and the Prison Society conducted the analysis.

This is the first survey of what is planned to be quarterly surveys of perceptions of conditions among ACJ residents. ACJ administration and staff, the JOB, and county leadership should be commended for undertaking this regular, extensive, listening of jail residents.

Demographics

The demographics of survey respondents was largely reflective of the total residents at the jail during the time period the survey was administered.

85% of respondents identified as male, 13% as female, and 2% as non-binary, consistent with the overall population.

The median age of respondents was 34 years old while the median age of the total population was 35 years old.

The one area where there was some demographic difference between respondents and the overall population was race and ethnicity. Of the 330 jail residents who completed the survey, 45% identify as white, 40% identify as Black, 5% as Hispanic, 2% as API, and 11% as other. At the time the survey was conducted, the population was 40% white, 59% Black, 1.8% Hispanic, 0.6% API, and 0.2% other. This difference is likely due to the nature of self-reporting, with many more respondents choosing “other” on the survey than is found in the jail-given information.

Inedible food; insufficient portions

Most of the time you can't identify what the meal is to begin with.

The kitchen is very nasty I was a cook for 6 months down there and they made me serve old food more than once and there mice and roaches everywhere and don't understand how the health department don't do anything about this somebody has to getting paid off because this don't make sense.



Food is not edible.

The food is never hot, they throw your food on top of other food so it be mixed together!!! They serve uncooked food, are frozen food!! They make you buy salt and pepper, ketchup and other things for your food that you normally get in your tray for free!! They serve the same thing all the time to save money for their self!!! And the food is so nasty you have to buy commissary just to eat and that is over priced!!

The food isn't necessarily rotten but a lot of it is inedible. There are meals like ground up hotdogs over undercooked, unflavored noodles in water. And whatever meat byproduct they are using in meals is horrible. It smells spoiled and tastes nothing like ground meat.

Individuals reported that meals are often inedible due to spoiled or rotten food and that, as a result they often go hungry or purchase commissary food to supplement.

- 95% of respondents reported regularly going hungry, with 75% reporting they go hungry every day.
- 55% of respondents reported receiving rotten food in the past month.
- 39% reported they never receive hot food, while 39% reported that they are provided hot food at least once a day. The remaining respondents reported hot food is served sometimes.
- 32% of people reported they are entitled to receive an alternative diet for their health or religious reasons.
 - 82% of people who stated they have an alternative diet reported that they do not receive this diet.

Twenty narrative responses mentioned seeing rats, bugs, or rat droppings in their food trays or in the kitchen. Fifteen narrative responses reported seeing mold on vegetables, beans, bread or meat. Several narrative responses also included descriptions of seeing or smelling rotten or rancid food.

Thirty narrative responses complained that commissary prices are exceptionally high and/or commissary is regularly out of stock. Five of these responses included the opinion that the kitchen food is intentionally inedible so that jail residents will be forced to purchase overpriced commissary resulting in profit for the meal-service provider. These responses indicate a low level of trust of the jail and county administration and the food service provider.

Violence & Verbal Abuse

I was threatened with physical violence by a C.O. and verbally abused. She told me to shut the fuck up before she drops me.



This facility is not a safe facility. Many of the corrections officers do not do anything to prevent assaults from happening. They just say if you fight or get into a fight then you will be sent to the hole where you are isolated and treated even worse.

The staff here are very disrespectful and the medical department are very rude and don't care about the inmates.

Sixty-two percent respondents reported that they did not feel safe. Witnessing or being the subject of physical or verbal abuse was correlated to feelings of safety.

- 62% of respondents reported feeling unsafe at ACJ.
 - The longer people reported being in the ACJ, the less safe they reported feeling. 46% of people at ACJ less than two weeks reported feeling unsafe, 59% of people at ACJ for less than a month reported feeling unsafe, 68% of people at ACJ for more than six months reported feeling unsafe.
 - 64% of Black residents and 54% of white residents reported not feeling safe in ACJ.
- 45% reported having witnessed physical abuse.
- 50% reported being the subject of staff verbal abuse; 24% reported staff being verbally abusive towards them more than 3 times.
- 19% of respondents reported experience of physical abuse from a staff member; 25% of respondents reported experiencing violence or physical abuse from another incarcerated person.

Most people who reported experiencing physical or verbal abuse by staff did not report their experience to prison administration.

- 18% of all respondents stated they had reported physical or verbal abuse.
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In narrative responses, respondents named 38 individual corrections staff who they stated were responsible for misconduct, assault, and/or harassment. Seven corrections staff were named in more than one incident. We provided these names and reports to the jail administration on November 23, 2022.

Unsanitary facility conditions

These are the worst living conditions that I ever been in in my life.

I worked in the kitchen seven days a week 4am-1pm no days off for free. There are mice and rats and roaches and black mold literally everywhere in the kitchen, they never do



anything about it. Mice poop all over the clean dish racks and they just pile clean dishes on mouse droppings.

I been locked in my cell with no running water for 36 hours having to use the restroom on top of another man's waste is humiliating.

Seventy-six percent of respondents reported seeing rodents or excrement from rodents in ACJ. That said,

- 94% of respondents reported access to cleaning supplies, with 42% saying they have access to cleaning supplies every week, and 52% saying they have access to cleaning supplies sometimes but not every week.
- 87% of respondents reported the ability to do laundry at least once a week.

Based on our conversations with people in custody at several Pennsylvania county jails over the last year, we can state that this level of access to laundry is better than at several large facilities in the commonwealth, including the Delaware County jail and the Philadelphia prison system.

Insufficient physical and mental healthcare

My mental state of mind is getting worse and worse. I'm not getting the proper medication for my mental issues. It's making me see and hear things that's not here or there. I need serious help please.

It took the jail 85 days to give me a replacement medication for my meds I was on when I entered the jail.

The jail is understaffed. Causing them to rush through inmates neglecting and undermining medical attention.

Individuals reported that their physical and mental healthcare needs are not being met. This includes reports of lack of response to requests for a medical visit, long wait times, and difficulty obtaining prescription medications.

- 290 respondents (88%) stated they had requested medical care. Of these respondents:
 - 59% stated they had not received care.
 - Of the people who stated they did receive care, 61% were dissatisfied with the care they received.
 - 59% of the people who received care reported waiting more than two weeks before being seen by a medical professional.
- 215 respondents (65%) reported being diagnosed with a mental health condition.



- 54% of people who reported they had a mental health diagnosis reported they had a prescription for medication to treat their mental health condition. Of these, 54% reported they were receiving their medication and 36% said they were not receiving their medication.
- 5% of people who reported having a mental health diagnosis reported they receive regular individual therapy.
- 3% reported receiving regular group therapy.

Connection to outside supports

The recent Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) report on recidivism found that people in state prisons who are able to stay connected to loved ones, particularly through visits, were significantly less likely to be reincarcerated after release than people who did not stay connected to loved ones.

This survey asked two questions about staying connected to loved ones – one question about availability of phone calls and another about availability of visits.

- 83% of people reported being able to make a phone call at least once a day.
- 16% of people reported getting one or more family visits a week.

Because of the limitations of the way we asked about family visits, it is unclear how many people are getting family visits on a monthly basis. In subsequent surveys we will inquire further into access to family visits.

Based on our conversations with people in custody at several Pennsylvania county jails over the last year, we can confirm that there is greater access to phone calls at the ACJ than at several Pennsylvania county jails.

Locked in cells for extended periods

Although we did not ask specifically about out of cell time, 45 people stated in their comments that they received very little out of cell time, with frequent lockdowns preventing activities.

Conclusion

Thank you Warden Harper, the ACJ staff, JOB, and county leadership for requesting and facilitating this survey. Undertaking this survey is evidence of a strong commitment to transparency. The county should be commended for undertaking this survey, and for continuing to conduct it on a twice-yearly basis going forward.



We will be sharing this survey with the JOB in advance of their February 2, 2023 meeting and will be publishing it on our website soon thereafter.

If the Jail provides us a written response on or before January 24th, 2023, we will include the response with this memorandum when it is shared with the JOB and the public. In particular, we encourage the ACJ to let us know any additional information or detail that would be helpful in understanding these findings, as well as the ACJ's planned efforts to address any of the concerns identified by residents.



COUNTY OF



ALLEGHENY

TO: PA PRISON SOCIETY
FROM: WARDEN ORLANDO HARPER AND JAIL ADMINISTRATION
DATE: JANUARY 23, 2023
SUBJECT: SUMMER 2022 PRISON EXPERIENCE SURVEY

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your survey from this summer. We welcome feedback and will use the information as a constructive tool to review our operations and implement changes when possible.

As you're likely aware, the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work conducted a survey in Fall 2021 which was just provided to us this fall. There are many similarities in the findings which you will also find in our responses.

Thank you for conveying the responses regarding laundry and phone calls. Access to cleaning supplies and laundry services has been a focus at the ACJ, so it was reassuring to read that access here is better than at several other large facilities in the state.

We also understand that being incarcerated is a jarring and traumatic experience and that incarcerated people often feel isolated and a sense of loss of control. It is vital that people housed at the ACJ can communicate with their loved ones outside the jail. When visits had to be suspended because of COVID, we instituted a new policy granting all incarcerated individuals with phone privileges a free 10-minute call every day. Through the tablet program, incarcerated individuals can also maintain regular contact with friends and family through video visitation.

Your survey also notes areas of concern, and we appreciate the opportunity respond to them.

First, as it relates to food service at the facility:

Summit Food Services, LLC is the facility's food service vendor. The ACJ food vendor is selected, awarded and contracted through a competitive bidding process. Under the contract, incarcerated individuals are provided a daily diet that meets nutritional requirements as determined by the vendor dietician.

In 2020, the daily caloric intake was increased by 400 calories, or 14 percent, to 3,200 calories, where it remains today. (Note: 2,800 calories per day is the national standard.) The 3,200 caloric content does not include additional nutritional supplements, like those ordered by medical for pregnant women or individuals with other special medical needs. Meals are selected from a

menu created by the vendor's dietician and are designed to meet recommended dietary allowances and caloric intake requirements and include fruit at breakfast.

The jail's current contract with Summit expires on June 30, 2023. The meal service request for proposals (RFP) has been issued, and we expect to bring in a vendor who will meet the challenges of feeding three meals a day to an average of 1,500 incarcerated individuals.

Second, as it relates to concerns with safety at the facility:

Safety and security are top priorities of the jail, and we have policies and practices in place to separate incarcerated individuals from others with whom contact may result in violence; to segregate and increase security around violent offenders; and to ensure that people who might cause harm to themselves cannot do so. But we are also reliant upon reports of additional incidents to be able to respond accordingly.

This administration expects all incarcerated individuals to be always treated with dignity and respect and treats all reports to the contrary very seriously. We ensure correctional officers' training includes courses on interpersonal communication and verbal de-escalation, suicide prevention and intervention, and mental health first aid. When anyone falls short of our standards, they are held accountable with consequences up to and including termination and/or criminal charges.

Individuals can report complaints and grievances in person, in writing or through the tablets. Correctional officers and staff who witness incidents where individuals are not treated according to policy are required to report that interaction. Captains and sergeants are responsible for responding to those reports and addressing any issues.

Regarding rodents or rodent droppings in the jail:

ACJ contracts with Fort Pitt Exterminators for pest control services, including treatment twice per week in our kitchen facilities. The kitchen is inspected regularly by the Health Department and ACJ leadership has requested additional inspections when warranted. The jail recently assigned a captain to supervise all kitchen operations at the ACJ; that captain will work with a team of sergeants and officers dedicated to supervising the operation of the kitchen and ensuring cleaning and sanitization practices are followed.

We also continue to actively pursue additional steps to ensure the cleanliness of the facility, including but not limited to: posting jobs for a Food Services Manager (safe-cert requirement) and Food Services Supervisor (safe-cert preferred) to help oversee kitchen operations; researching the feasibility of hiring a civilian-cleaning crew to perform deep cleans of the entire kitchen facility on a nightly basis; strengthening language in the next extermination and food vendor contracts to ensure accountability; and working with our facilities' crews to identify ways in which pests may be entering the facility and remedy them.

Regarding medical care:

This is an area we have worked on diligently with the jail's contracted medical provider, Allegheny Health Network (AHN), whose work is supplemented by non-provider medical staff

employed by the county or contracted through agency services. Last year, we reduced backlog created from the strain on resources during the pandemic by well over half, and the average wait time for non-emergent healthcare requests was reduced from 45 to 4.5 days.

In August, we launched a facility-wide Interdisciplinary Patient Care program that has been expanded to housing units on all levels of the facility. The program is designed with a goal of streamlining the way healthcare is delivered at the jail to increase speed and efficiency, maximize the use of resources, create stronger provider-patient relationships, and improve patient outcomes. Modeled as an outpatient healthcare office, providers assess physical healthcare needs of individuals. When serious health concerns arise, individuals are seen in the jail's medical clinic the same day. Administrators and staff members hold weekly meetings to provide feedback and assemble data. Dr. Ashley Brinkman, the jail's Health Services Administrator noted that "we found very successful outcomes and positive feedback from both our staff and our patients."

In 2022, the ACJ received over 15,000 new arrests and admitted over 8,500 incarcerated individuals; nurses administered 1,436,389 medications; we treated over 750 incarcerated individuals with Medication Assisted Treatment for Substance Use Disorders; and nearly 1,000 incarcerated individuals were admitted to Mental Health housing. We have in-house access to dialysis, dental, x-ray/radiology, physical therapy, optometry, orthopedic, OB/GYN, wound care, clinical and laboratory. If an individual needs additional medical care beyond what is provided in-house, AHN coordinates that care.

Unfortunately, many people in the ACJ come from vulnerable populations, and many bring with them serious medical conditions that have not been properly treated for extended periods. The medical care they receive in the ACJ is often the first treatment they have received in years. The medical team at the ACJ will continue to use every available resource to treat all individuals who need care.

Finally, regarding connection to outside supports and out-of-cell time:

The jail has returned to full recreation time for incarcerated individuals, but COVID-19 mitigation efforts required previous preventative protocols. We acknowledge the comments that being in a cell for long periods (necessitated by the public health concerns) was hard on residents. While necessary during COVID, the jail moved as fast as we could and as safely as possible out of lockdown and back to normal operations. We do so in full collaboration with our medical provider and in consultation with the Health Department to ensure that the health and safety of the incarcerated individuals here was the priority and focus of any decision.

Again, thank you for conducting this survey and sharing your results so that we may better address the needs of those incarcerated here. While we understand that no one wants to be in jail and feedback will from those experiencing perhaps the lowest point in their lives will generally be negative, our focus is on keeping everyone within the facility safe and to provide people who are sent here with the resources they need so that when they leave, they never return. Your work helps with that effort.