



## **ACJ Correction Officer Job Satisfaction Survey**

### **Results and Analysis**

Attached is the summary and analysis of the “ACJ Correctional Officers Job Satisfaction Survey” administered by the Corrections Collective.

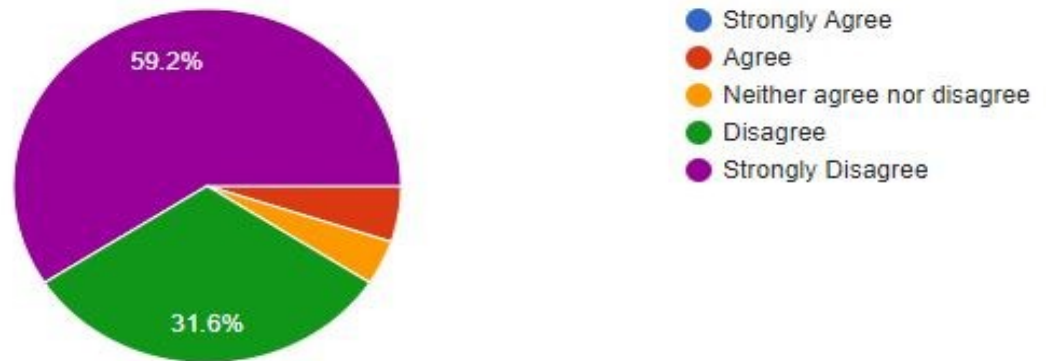
The survey included 12 closed-ended questions relating to work-environment, benefits, work-life balance, and training. The survey also included 2 open ended questions relating to staff retention. This survey was made available to all correctional officers currently working at the Allegheny County Jail from April 27<sup>th</sup> – May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023. During this time, 98 correctional officers provided feedback regarding their job satisfaction and recommendations for employee retention.

Our aim in compiling the enclosed report is to provide information and insight for those accountable for conditions within the ACJ.

## Section I : Closed - Ended Questions & Responses

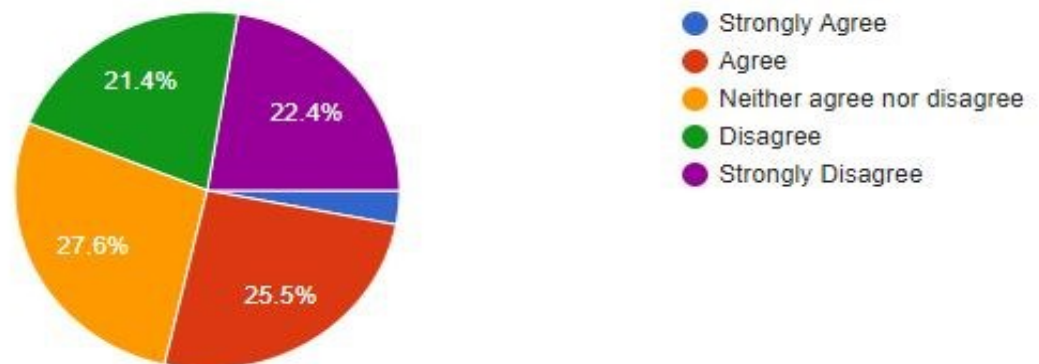
**I feel valued and respected as a CO at the Allegheny County Jail.**

98 responses



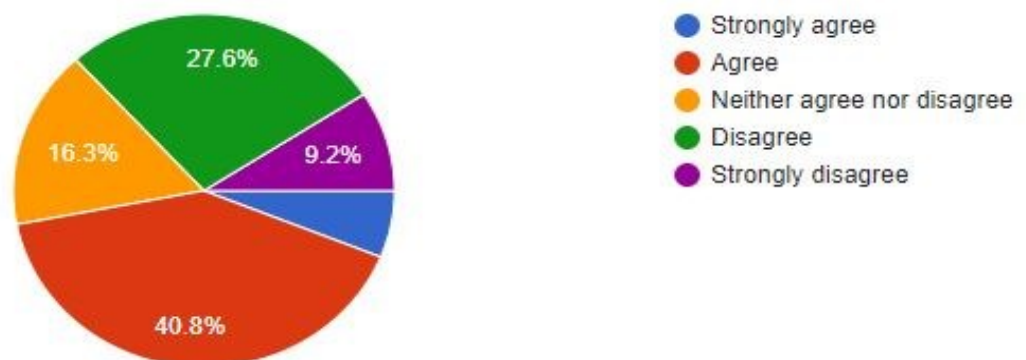
**I am paid fairly for what I am asked to do.**

98 responses



**My job benefits meet my family needs.**

98 responses



## Section I : Closed - Ended Questions & Responses

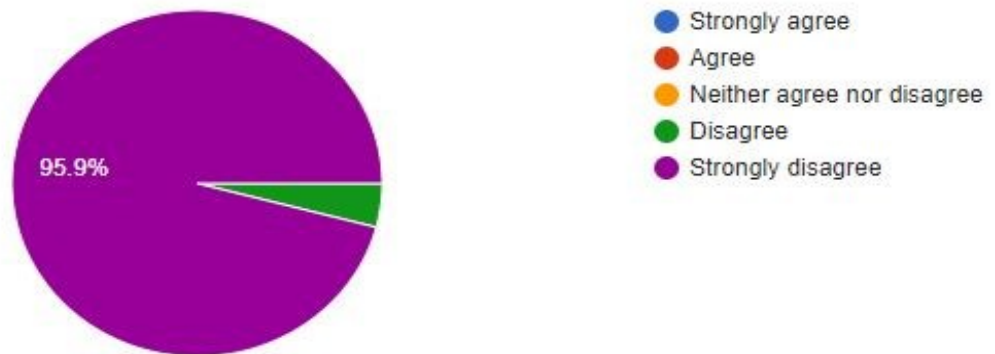
**Concern for my physical safety has become more of a problem.**

98 responses



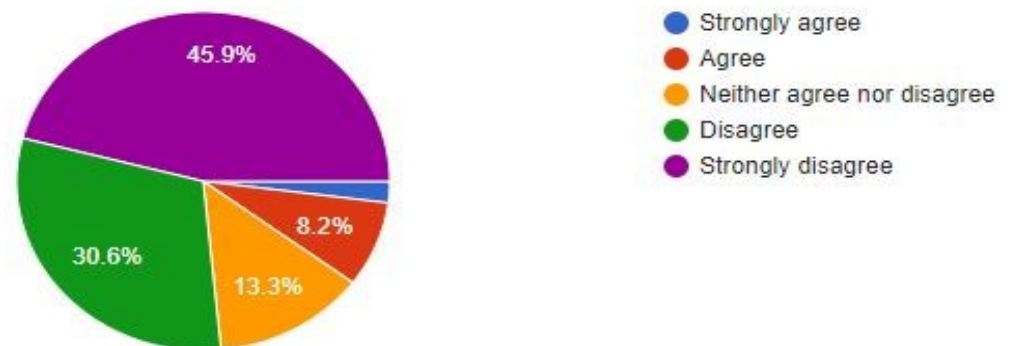
**Each shift is staffed with enough CO's.**

98 responses



**I am not asked to perform work duties outside of my job description.**

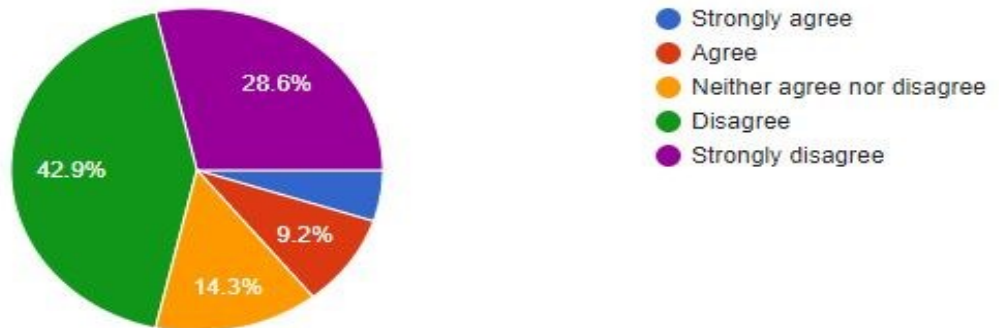
98 responses



## Section I : Closed - Ended Questions & Responses

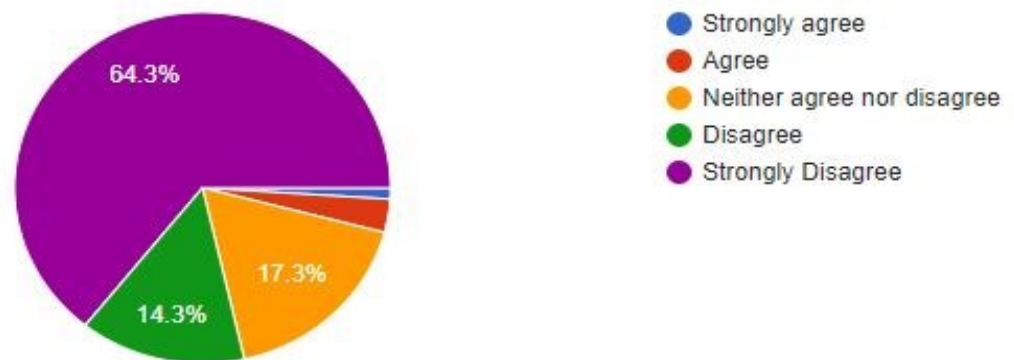
**I've had enough training to perform the work I am expected to do.**

98 responses



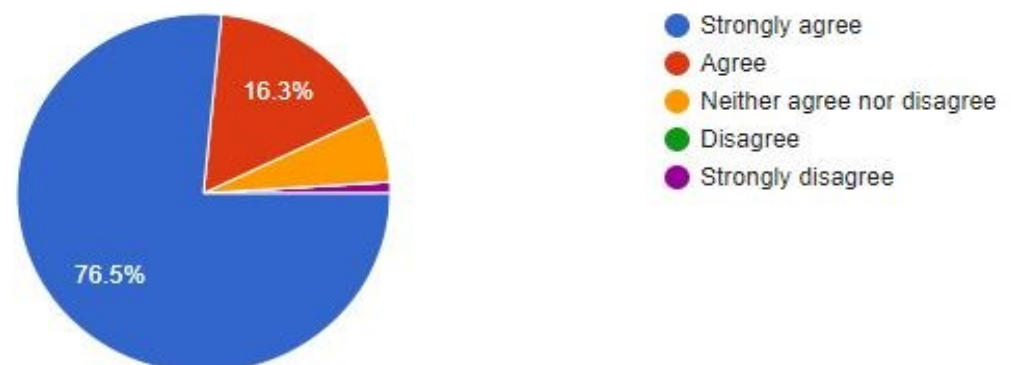
**I have flexibility with my schedule for personal or family needs.**

98 responses



**Forced overtime has become disruptive to my family and me.**

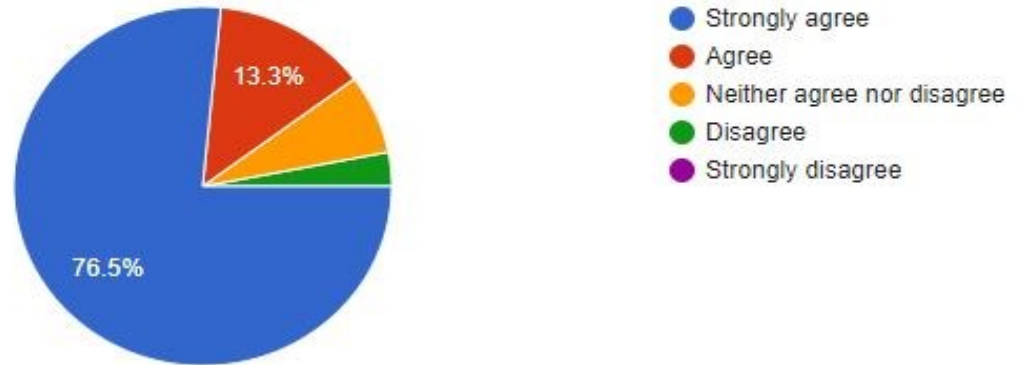
98 responses



## Section I : Closed - Ended Questions & Responses

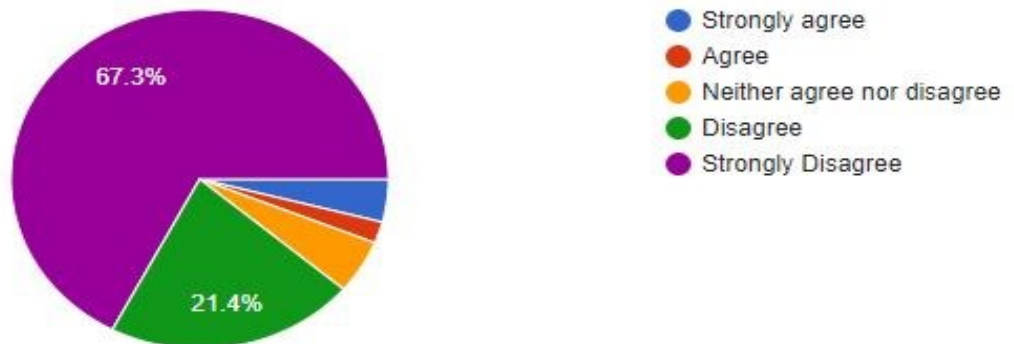
**Overtime has affected my physical and mental health.**

98 responses



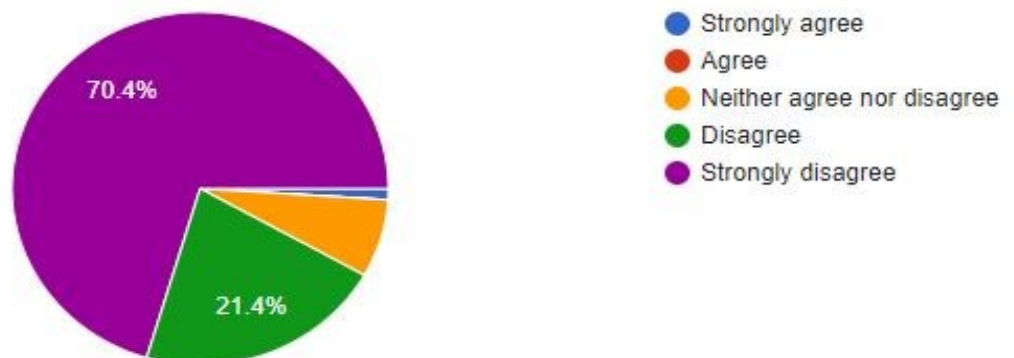
**Management understands the challenges I experience on my job.**

98 responses



**Management is receptive to my feedback and suggestions.**

98 responses



## **Section II : Closed - Ended Questions Summary and Discussion**

The following is a summary of the responses provided by 98 officers to the 12 close-ended questions of the survey. A brief discussion follows each of the results provided.

The question that received the strongest disapproval asked whether there are enough officers on each shift. 100% of respondents disagreed, or strongly disagreed that each shift is staffed with enough CO's. Additionally, 92.7% agreed or strongly agreed that forced overtime has become disruptive to their family. These responses indicate that the vast majority of officers believe there is a serious staffing problem at the jail.

Directly related to understaffing, 92.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that concern for officer's physical safety has become more of a concern, and 89.8% agreed or strongly agreed that overtime has affected their physical and mental health.

Based off the results of all four of these questions, it is clear the vast majority of officers believe they are working too many hours, their physical safety is more of a concern, and the additional overtime is affecting their families, as well as their physical and mental health.

Another area of major concern is the relationship between the administration and CO's. 88.7% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "Management understands the challenges I experience on my job," and 91.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "Management is receptive to my feedback and suggestions." Communication would then appear to be top down with limited opportunities for CO's to provide feedback suggestions or talk with administration about the struggles they experience on their job.

Additionally, 90.8% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagree with the statement "I feel valued and respected as a CO at the Allegheny County Jail." This response is not surprising given the responses pertaining to the relationship between CO's and the administration. An important question is how much is the response to this question based in how the CO's feel they are perceived by the public? How much does the public truly understand and value the plight and the day to day experiences of the CO?

Concern over the disconnect between the officers and administration was also raised in the 2022 ACJ Mortality report conducted by the NCCHC:

"Information pertaining to important operational issues, staff safety, inmate safety or the safety and security of the facility itself must be communicated. Staff, including line supervisors, indicated they don't hear information on critical incidents, specifically deaths and suicides or follow up or corrective information. Regardless of the circumstances, not communicating corrective actions could increase liability as could appear as deliberate indifference. P. 40



## **Section II : Closed - Ended Questions Summary and Discussion**

Previous studies have found that control over scheduling, and the ability to schedule off for personal and family needs are the most important factors for retention of correctional officers<sup>1</sup>. In this present study, lack of flexibility was raised as a serious concern by respondents. 78.6% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “I have flexibility with my schedule for personal or family needs”. This evident lack of flexibility is reflected in responses to questions regarding forced overtime and the impact it has on family and physical and mental health.

Two statements raised concerns that officers are required to perform tasks beyond their scope of training: 76.3% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “ I am not asked to perform duties outside of my job description” and 72.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “I’ve had enough training to perform the work I am expected to do.” All of these factors can have a significant effect on morale and safety.

Statements relating to benefits and wages received the highest approval. Only 36.8% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “ My job benefits meet my family needs,” and just 43.8% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “I am paid fairly for what I am asked to do.”

Based on these results, the majority of officers are primarily concerned with forced overtime, staffing deficits for correctional officers, and physical safety.

<sup>1</sup> "*Correctional Officers: Strategies to Improve Retention*", MTC Institute, 2010

### Section III : Open- Ended Questions Summary and Discussion

*“What are your recommendations that would reinforce your decision to continue to work at the ACJ?”*

There were 74 responses to this question. Some responses mirror those indicated in the close ended questions, but provide more insight into what officers are experiencing. The most repeated responses fell into 6 main categories:

1. **Call for changes in the leadership and administration**—included in 24 responses
2. **Call for improved support and communication with correctional officers**—included in 21 responses
3. **Call to hire more correctional officers**— included in 17 responses
4. **Call for revisions to overtime system**—included in 17 responses
5. **Call for higher pay or better benefits**—included in 13 responses
6. **Call for increased concern for officer safety**—included in 8 responses

Included below are direct quotes provided by the respondents correlating with each of the above categories.

#### **Call for revisions to the overtime system / Call to hire more officers**

Many of the responses tied together problems with staff retention and forced overtime. Forced overtime and the punitive actions taken by administration relating to forced overtime is on the minds of many officers. (when officers use the word force, they are referring to forced overtime).

*“Stop firing new officers that are still on probation for making one minor mistake or for refusing a force because they were forced numerous times in a row or when they are physically ill and provide medical documentation”.*

*“Limit the amount of forced overtime in a week. To no more than 2 or 3 times in a week. Do not discipline officers that are forced no than 3 times in a week for trivial things that may be caused by fatigue. We have no administrators who have worked such a work load as is now ask off the officers.”*

*“There should be a number in place for the amount of forces per week for the new contract. For example, Officers should be mandate maximum 2 times per week. Officers should not be forced for a “REASONABLE” amount of time per week. Per the Jail a reasonable amount of forces is 5 days per week which interferes into off days.”*

*“Working on the forcing to spend time with my family.”*

*“Hire more officers so people aren't forced every day.”*



### **Section III : Open- Ended Questions Summary and Discussion**

In response to the forced overtime, some officers are asking the administration to share in the added workload.

*“Have the sergeants or captains oversee suboxone pass instead of leaving it to the officers to oversee themselves as the Staff leaves the unit”*

*“Give the sergeants more responsibility and have them help the officers on the units rather than continuously adding more and more duties to the officers daily responsibilities”*

Some officers reported frustration over the use of FMLA and called for even distribution of overtime.

*“Get everyone to do their fair share. The force list makes zero sense and this job is not sustainable without being forced to go get fmla. Maybe 12 hour shifts is the answer. At least the OT is spread out evenly.”*

*“The County needs to make real efforts to the curb abuse of the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) with +80% of Officers having FML, the majority of whom obtained it so that they can refuse Mandated OT. Unsustainable.”*

*“Evening out the OT across all 3 shifts.”*

#### **Call for improved support and communication with correctional officers**

Officers made references to the administration not understanding the challenges officers experience on their job.

*“More realistic leadership. People who see the things that we see everyday and understand the type of people we oversee and the challenges that come with it.”*

*“New leadership and someone with real experience. Some that works with the officer instead of ruling with fear and discipline.”*

Punitive measures to induce compliance was mentioned in several responses:

*“Discussing mistakes and errors with officers and showing us how to fix them, rather than writing us up only to step us up to termination”*

*“Revamp the administration so that officers can actually be respected and not have to fear for our jobs every single day”.*

*“Better administration that doesn't view their employees as the problem”.*

### **Section III : Open- Ended Questions Summary and Discussion**

Some responses concerned the administration micromanaging:

*“If they stop micromanaging every little thing without knowing why we do what we do. I feel I am not trusted as an adult who didn’t get arrested yet I get treated worse than the “jail residents.”*

*“Allow us to do our job and not micromanage us.”*

*“If management would change and allow us to do our jobs.”*

Some responses concerned the need for upward communication:

*“Listening to the officers’ opinions and ideas on how to manage the jail and allowing us to run our units without micro-managing our every move and decisions.”*

*“Getting rid of the administration and fake deputies that make decisions without consulting the officers who work firsthand with the daily operations of the facility.”*

*“They create safety concerns when they warehouse inmates and close pods and cutting jobs. There is no communication in the jail with all levels of staff creating uncertainty and creating severe safety problems.”*

#### **Call for increased concern for officer safety**

As reflected in the quote above, safety has become a concern for many officers. A few responses indicate the impression that safety of the incarcerated individuals is prioritized over officer safety.

*“Additional staffing for safety, become less inmate centric with more concern for officer safety.”*

*“Get rid of the current administration-wardens, deputy wardens and majors. They have done nothing but make the job harder and more dangerous for officers AND inmates.”*

*“Prioritizing safety and security for the officers & inmates”*

### Section III : Open- Ended Questions Summary and Discussion

#### **Call for changes in the leadership and administration**

Overall, 24 responses included a call for a change in leadership and the administration. A majority of these responses called for termination.

*“Better leadership from our superiors. If they don ’t build moral and show leadership how can you expect your employees to be better.”*

*“Better administration that doesn't view their employees as the problem.”*

*“Complete change of Staff from Majors Up the ranks to Warden”*

In addition to the main categories above, some officers made other recommendations. Several related to training:

*“Increased in-person training, not thru PowerDMS.*

*“Give officers more tools for discipline”*

*“Defensive training tactics more often”.*

And others provided general recommendations:

*“Pay double time to stay for a force”.*

*“Provide more nutritious food in the dining hall, especially when we are forced and stuck for 16 hrs”.*

*“Start using the padded cells when the situation warrants it”.*

*“Remove the CRU officers from the regular bids so officers who aren ’t on the team can bid on those jobs”.*

*“Allow inmates to charge their tablets because they only work for 7 hours when they have access to them for 12.5 hours and have to share them for 12.5 hours and have to share them with their celly”.*

*“Better health care for retirees, raise to at least account for rising Inflation and cost of living”.*

*“Better food in the Officer ’s Dining Room(ODR) and free parking would be nice too”.*

### Section III : Open- Ended Questions Summary and Discussion

*“For Your Peers That Terminated Employment, Why Do You Think They Left.”*

There were 81 responses to this question. Most responses fell into the following 5 categories:

1. **Left because of forced overtime** (included in 35 responses)
2. **Left because of management/ micromanagement** (included in 26 responses)
3. **Feeling undervalued or unsupported by leadership** (included in 26 responses)
4. **Left due to lack of work-life balance** (included in 14 responses)
5. **Safety concerns** (included in 9 responses)

Mentions of forced overtime and lack of work-life balance were included in 45 distinct responses.

Mentions of management/micromanagement and feeling undervalued or unsupported were included in 47 distinct responses.

Safety concerns were linked to forced overtime in 4 of the responses:

*“The overtime. All of them have said the same thing. Nobody wants to work 80 hours a week in a dangerous work environment”*

*“My peers left because of the following Forced daily Forced into off days No time to spend with family Sleep deprived They have to work dangerous pods on overtime hours. Health issues such as weight loss due to poor nutrition due to the lack of time spent at home to eat proper meals per day.”*

*“Forced overtime, unsafe working environment”*

*“Understaffing and safety concerns”*

Several responses focused on the administration being disconnected from the officers, lacking awareness of the work challenges of the officers:

*“Forced overtime, short staff, management has no idea what it’s like to run a pod and what’s expected of you”.*

*“The county doesn’t care about them, their families, or their needs. Administration is out of touch, policy is being made by civilians who don’t do our jobs making the entire facility more dangerous”.*

*“The expectation is that we don’t have lives outside of our work”*

*“We are not appreciated and consistently put under massive stress, not just the inmates but Warden and people up the street, who do not do our job.”*

### **Section III : Open- Ended Questions Summary and Discussion**

Responses also focused on the punitive actions being taken by administration in spite of officers working very excessive forced overtime:

*“They knew that administration wouldn't support us and actively try to hound us. my example is the team if people hired to watch cameras all day to write us up. the cameras should be there to support us not solely to punish us.”*

*“Too much overtime. Administration targeting the wrong things for disciplinary action.”*

*“They left due to the amount of forced overtime and the fact that administration seeks to target officers for anything.”*

*“Forced overtime, bad and hostile management, constant threats of termination.”*

Some of the officers talked about the stress put on families and on the officer when an officer has to work so much forced overtime.

*“Unfair policies that not only put strain on themselves but their personal life as well.”*

*“Ruined their family life, caused undue stress, overtime caused health issues, and were treated like they are worthless.”*

*“Extreme stress while being under appraeciaded and forced every day. Some had to decide between having a family and providing for their family.”*

*“Mandated overtime, stress, missing their families”*

## **Section IV : Analysis of the Data and Conclusions for the ACJ Correctional Officer Job Satisfaction Survey**

From the results of the survey, the overwhelming concern of the correctional officers is forced overtime. Though increasing pay and benefits are mentioned, the dominant concern is how forced overtime is disrupting an officer's family life, the officer's physical and mental health and the officer's sense of safety.

These officers working forced overtime should receive the utmost support to succeed. A laser beam of support from administration, the union, the Jail Oversight Board and the public should be provided to these officers. These officers are making huge sacrifices. These officers should be given a maximum opportunity to develop a schedule that will complement the care they need to give to their families and their own physical and mental health. As one officer recommended, these officers should be paid double time, be provided free parking and a steak in between their shifts because of the sacrifices they are making.

CO's recognize that the officers most vulnerable to terminating their jobs are the officers who are relatively new, who are assigned to work many hours of forced overtime, and who work on the most difficult pods where safety becomes more of a risk. This needs to change in which a more equitable system is devised to take some of the weight off the backs of the officers recently hired. This will improve retention.

Coupled with this concern of forced overtime, is how management is disciplining officers who work these long hours and the micromanaging officers are experiencing. Officers say a punitive model of intimidation and a threat to losing one's job is used often to achieve compliance. Using fear and intimidation tactics is an archaic way of achieving motivation in the workplace, especially when officers are working such long hours. The fear tactics and micromanagement wreak havoc concerning the officers' morale.

A supportive model needs to be implemented in which these officers need to be seen as professionals who can grow in their profession if given the opportunity. All of the top down communication needs to stop. What NCCHC found in administration not providing corrective information to line staff also needs to stop.



## **Section IV : Analysis of the Data and Conclusions for the ACJ Correctional Officer Job Satisfaction Survey**

As one officer recommended, the use of video cameras in many instances should be seen as a learning tool in which ideas of training and support are provided instead of the cameras always being used as evidence to discipline or fire people. For officers to grow in their profession and seek advancement, training is a key and their needs can be communicated in a bottom up relationship with administration instead of the communication always being top down. The two pie graphs concerning the officer's relationship with administration identify this communication between the officers and administration as a significant problem.

The responses in the survey to the statement, "I feel valued and respected as a CO at the Allegheny County Jail" received over a 90% negative response to that statement. Overwhelmingly, officers do not feel valued or respected, which significantly affects their morale and can affect their job performance.

The tremendous value the officers can bring to the jail must be articulated. An officer who actively engages with residents, has learned effective ways to intervene in a crisis and who exhibits professionalism is an image of an officer the public needs to become aware of.

The jail cannot function without security. The more officers who terminate employment at the Allegheny County Jail, the more time residents will be in their cells. The lower the officer's morale and increased tiredness based on working many long hours, the less effective officers will be in providing effective interventions and protecting the lives of the residents and staff at the jail.

A purpose of this survey is to provide a blueprint of what officers at the jail are thinking and saying. The current county administration, current warden and the JOB as well as the future county administration and warden need to use the results of this survey as a framework to institute changes and develop an effective working relationship with the officers. Time can no longer be wasted.