



New York State Law Enforcement Officers Union, Council 82

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF STATE, COUNTY AND MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO

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To: Senate Standing Committee on Crime Victims, Crime & Correction and Assembly Standing Committee on Corrections
From: New York State Law Enforcement Officers Union, Council 82, AFSCME, AFL-CIO
Date: May 09, 2025
Subject: Safety of Persons in Custody, Transparency, and Accountability within State Correctional Facilities
RE: Statement from Council 82 Regarding the Purpose and Scope of Examination into Safety Transparency, and Accountability in DOCCS Facilities

On behalf of the dedicated NYSDOCCS Lieutenants and law enforcement professionals represented by Council 82 across the State, we submit the following statement to the panel tasked with the examination of safety for individuals in custody, and efforts to ensure transparency and accountability in New York State's correctional facilities operated by the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS).

We recognize and affirm the critical importance of ensuring the safety, dignity, and constitutional rights of all individuals in the custody of the State. Correction Lieutenants are the professionals tasked with maintaining order and security, both at the front line and supervisory level, often under extraordinarily difficult and dangerous conditions. Our members perform their duties with integrity, courage, and professionalism, despite being routinely exposed to threats, unrealistic duty expectations, and systemic under-resourcing.

As the panel examines the causes and contributing factors to incidents affecting persons in custody, it is imperative to consider the following systemic realities:

- **Chronic Staffing Shortages:** Facilities across the state continue to operate with dangerously low staffing levels. This has increased risks for both officers and incarcerated individuals, stretching response times, limiting programming, and undermining safety protocols.
- **Erosion of Institutional Authority:** Recent policy shifts have weakened officers' ability to manage behavior and enforce facility rules, contributing to a rise in assaults, contraband proliferation, and disorder. A balanced approach to discipline and behavioral management is essential for maintaining safety and rehabilitation.
- **Training and Resources:** Departmental staff require ongoing, robust training—not only in security and de-escalation tactics, but also in trauma-informed care, mental health awareness, and cultural competency. Yet, access to such training is inconsistent, and often underfunded.

- **Transparency with Context:** While we support appropriate transparency and oversight, reporting and public disclosures must be contextualized. Misrepresentation of incidents without proper context risks undermining public confidence and officer morale, and can obscure the root causes of facility challenges.

We urge the panel to adopt a comprehensive and collaborative approach in developing solutions. This must include:

1. **Investment in staffing and infrastructure** to alleviate dangerous workloads and improve facility safety, to include the design and construction of new state of the art facilities to replace crumbling infrastructure and inefficient designs of old prisons.
2. **Increase the number of supervisory positions.** Since the Clinton escape in 2015, the responsibilities of NYSDOCCS sergeants and lieutenants have expanded significantly, limiting their capacity to effectively supervise front-line staff. Despite these increased demands, many facilities still operate with the same number of lieutenants as in the 1990s. To ensure proper oversight, accountability, and adherence to high Departmental standards, additional supervisory positions are urgently needed.
3. **A review of recent policy changes** that may inadvertently reduce safety and institutional control;
4. **Support for staff wellness and mental health**, recognizing the impact of cumulative stress and trauma;
5. **Commitment to balanced oversight** that protects rights and dignity without criminalizing or scapegoating correctional professionals.

The success of any correctional system lies not only in its ability to uphold justice, but also in how it treats those who serve within it. We stand ready to work alongside stakeholders to develop and implement reforms that truly advance the safety, transparency, and accountability we all seek.

Respectfully submitted,

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