



## STATE OF WASHINGTON

March 10, 2016

Honorable Troy Kelley  
Washington State Auditor  
P.O. Box 40021  
Olympia, WA 98504-0021

Dear Auditor Kelley:

We appreciate the opportunity to review and respond to the State Auditor's Office (SAO) performance audit report: "Improving Staff Safety in Washington's Prisons." Our agencies worked together to provide this joint response.

The Department of Corrections (DOC) was pleased that the SAO recognized that our safety initiatives are innovative and unique. As the report notes, "no other state has developed such an advanced and comprehensive group of initiatives focused on improving staff safety." The department promotes a culture that encourages personal responsibility for safety; takes initiative in addressing security deficiencies; and continually monitors security improvements in work areas, practices, procedures, policies and physical layouts. Department staff work with offenders in total and partial confinement facilities, as well as in communities across the state.

DOC has focused on staff training, policies and practices in an effort to support staff in identifying and discussing different points of vulnerability while working in prisons.

Staff responsibilities include working with offenders in unpredictable and often dangerous settings. Despite great personal risk, staff perform these duties with professionalism and pride. They do this because they believe in improving public safety and in working together for safe communities. They are mindful, too, that staff safety is a discipline that must be practiced by everyone at all times.

DOC strives to continually improve its staff safety and security practices, and is always interested in considering opportunities to enhance the safety of our state's prisons. With that in mind, we are providing the attached response to the auditor's recommendations.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Dan Pacholke in black ink.

Dan Pacholke  
Secretary  
Department of Corrections

Handwritten signature of David Schumacher in black ink.

David Schumacher  
Director  
Office of Financial Management

Enclosures (2)

cc: David Postman, Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor  
Kelly Wicker, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor  
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Jody Becker-Green, Deputy Secretary, Department of Corrections  
Stephen Sinclair, Assistant Secretary for Prisons Division, Department of Corrections

## OFFICIAL STATE CABINET AGENCY RESPONSE TO THE PERFORMANCE AUDIT ON IMPROVING STAFF SAFETY IN WASHINGTON'S PRISONS – MARCH 10, 2016

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This coordinated management response to the State Auditor's Office (SAO) performance audit report received on February 23, 2016, is provided by the Office of Financial Management and the Department of Corrections (DOC).

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### SAO Performance Audit Objectives:

The SAO objectives were designed to assess whether the department could do more to ensure the safety and security of its correctional officers by answering:

1. Does the department's prison safety and security program meet industry leading practices and standards, and in areas where it does not, why?
  2. Have recent changes in the department's prison safety and security program improved the safety and security of prison staff?
  3. What information does the department use to understand whether its program is improving prison staff safety and security, and is the information adequate for managing the program?
  4. What additional changes could the department make to improve the safety and security of prison staff?
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### SAO Conclusion:

The department's staff safety initiatives are innovative and unique.

### SAO Findings:

1. Staff feedback points to need to improve communication.
  2. There are opportunities to improve implementation of staff safety initiatives.
  3. Gaps exist between correctional leading practices and those used by the department.
  4. The department needs more specific performance goals and measures to improve the effectiveness of its staff safety initiatives.
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SAO states that based on the results of its audit, DOC should continue efforts to improve staff safety by determining whether adopting the following recommendations would be beneficial and implementing those that have the greatest potential to improve staff safety.
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**SAO Recommendation 1:** Address the issues with implementation of the staff safety initiatives our experts identified, including clarifying policies and procedures related to staff accountability, radios for non-custody staff, duress alarm testing, cameras, security specialists, place safety musters, and the local security advisory committees.

## STATE RESPONSE:

The items listed in this recommendation by SAO are already embedded in agency policy, staff position descriptions or in the strategic deployment process. For example, security cameras have been added and will continue to be added as funding becomes available. As noted by the auditors, the department was awarded funds in the 2013-15 and 2015-17 biennia to continue its camera installation initiative. DOC reviews its policies on a regular basis to determine where updates are needed and has a process for initiating urgent policy reviews when emergent issues arise.

### Action Steps and Time Frame

- DOC will conduct a focused review of its policies pertaining to these specific security issues (staff accountability, radios for non-custody staff, duress alarm testing, duties of security specialists, place safety musters and local security advisory committees) in advance of its regularly scheduled policy review periods, and clarify policy expectations as needed. *By July 1, 2016.*
- DOC will ensure inclusion of these specific security issues in its regular auditing process to ensure consistency in application and practice. *By July 1, 2016.*

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**SAO Recommendation 2:** Address the gaps identified by our experts between the department's safety related policies, procedures and practices and correctional leading practices. Specifically:

- a. Develop policies, procedures and practices to conduct staff searches.
- b. Evaluate and update the staffing model to ensure staffing levels are adequate and appropriately utilized to meet all the requirements placed on staff.
- c. Develop a more focused approach to monitor and audit the implementation of the staff safety initiatives to provide feedback on how well staff understand and are following relevant policies and procedures.
- d. Evaluate whether making further changes to department policies, procedures and practices to address additional identified gaps would be beneficial, including cell searches, issues with visibility, searching people entering facilities and access to facility control centers.

## STATE RESPONSE:

DOC acknowledges certain gaps between the department's safety-related practices and those characterized by the SAO's experts as "correctional leading practices." However, DOC believes it can use its established policy and procedural review tools to evaluate the extent to which such gaps might impact staff safety.

### *Staff searches*

DOC disputes the assertion that staff searches are a "correctional leading practice" as defined by SAO and its experts. A recent survey conducted by the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA) reported that less than half of states conduct staff searches. Many of DOC's higher-custody prisons use a system for random searches of staff entering prisons. The auditors note this as an inconsistency that raises the risk of contraband introduction, but it is not clear to what extent this may be true because as the auditors also note, the department is

recognized by ASCA's Performance Based Management System as maintaining a rate of institutional violence lower than many states. However, the department acknowledges the importance of considering the issue of contraband in its correctional facilities.

### ***Staffing model***

DOC is interested in increasing staffing to support prison operations. The staffing model was last updated in 1988. However, it should be noted that since 2011, the staffing model for custody staff has been enhanced several times as a direct result of requests made through the local and statewide security advisory committees to address safety concerns. This included funding positions in the 2013-15 operating budget for more staffing in medium-custody units on second shift and an additional eight-hour, seven-days-per-week (8/7) post on first shift at stand-alone minimum custody facilities.

### ***Policy reviews and audits***

DOC has a well-established process for reviewing and updating agency policies. All staff have the ability to inform agency policy. Prison policies adhere to standards of the American Correctional Association and National Institute of Corrections. DOC also has a comprehensive audit system for reviewing and addressing gaps in prison operations. These coordinated agency audits already address many of the safety initiatives reviewed by SAO.

### **Action Steps and Time Frame**

DOC will:

- Evaluate the need to expand the random search procedures conducted at some high security prisons to other facilities. *By Dec. 31, 2016.*
- Submit a decision package to OFM for funding of an external evaluation of its custody staffing model. *By Sept.30, 2016.*
- Ensure inclusion of the specific security items (cell searches, issues with visibility) in their regular auditing process to ensure consistency in application and practice. *By July 1, 2016.*
- Evaluate the need for changes to policies, procedures and practices for cell searches, issues with visibility, searches of people entering the facilities and access to facility control centers. *By July 1, 2016.*

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**SAO Recommendation 3:** Enhance the Department's current approach to assessing the effectiveness of the staff safety initiatives and how well they have been implemented at the facilities to provide additional opportunities for improvement. To do so:

- a. Develop specific performance goals and measure progress toward meeting those goals.
- b. Conduct periodic, anonymous staff surveys and focus groups to gather staff input on the effectiveness of the safety initiatives and whether they have improved how safe staff feel.

## **STATE RESPONSE:**

DOC appreciates the SAO's overview of the department's performance-based approach to staff safety, including its use of violent infractions as a key performance measure, tracking of security concerns/suggestions to monitor progress of staff safety activities and participation in ASCA's Performance Based Management System (which shows Washington is below average in offender violence against staff). While DOC believes these are relevant and reliable measures of staff safety, the department recognizes SAO's conclusion that they are not specific enough to measure a particular staff safety initiative. DOC appreciates the SAO noting the measures DOC has in place for Operation Place Safety (OPS) and oleoresin capsicum (OC) as examples of specific measures for particular staff safety initiatives. However, DOC believes the auditors overlooked the dynamic nature of these and other specific measures of the staff safety initiatives, as well as surveys and focus groups related to staff safety.

Also, DOC would like to note that the staff safety initiatives were implemented as a series of interventions, some of which were piloted and then expanded. The focus was to make improvements to staff safety and build on those improvements by using established performance measures such as violent infractions and by creating additional metrics relevant to the staff safety initiatives. This SAO recommendation supports our efforts in this area.

### ***Prison violence***

As noted by the auditors, the department uses prison violence — specifically, the rate of violent infractions — as one way to measure the safety of prisons. Prison violence is a key performance measure in both Results DOC — the agency's performance management framework — and the Governor's [Results Washington](#) performance management system. A display of DOC's prison violence performance measure can be found in Appendix A of this response.

The department has mostly met its prison violence performance target. For example, the rate of violent infractions has trended downward and remained mostly below its target of 1.00 violent infractions per 100 offenders. DOC has maintained the rate of violent infractions in its performance target even as the department closed several prisons, which increased the density of an offender population characterized by a mostly violent criminal profile. For example, McNeil Island Corrections Center, a major facility located in Pierce County, was closed in early 2011, which required the department to shift its offender population to other facilities.

Washington ranks 41<sup>st</sup> in the nation for rate of incarceration. This means the offenders who come to prison here are typically serving sentences for more serious and violent crimes than those in other states. This important context is largely ignored by the auditors in their analysis of DOC's prison violence performance measure. They found that the rate of violent infractions before and after the staff safety initiatives were implemented in 2011 did not show a significant change. This may be true, but it also lacks context to evaluate any counter effects on prison safety such as prison closures. Thus, DOC agrees with SAO that data on violent infractions may be too general to accurately measure the staff safety initiatives, but it takes issue with the minimal consideration given to a meaningful performance measure that still suggests prison safety has improved over time.

### ***Operation Place Safety***

DOC recognizes that using prison violent infractions as a measure is more effective at gauging the frequency rather than the severity of violence. For example, prison violence is measured by several kinds of violent infractions, and does not differentiate between those violent acts that may be more harmful than others. This is the exact reason for OPS, which seeks to deter the violent acts that pose the greatest risk to staff safety.

The auditors misattribute the purpose of OPS as seeking to reduce violence rather than explaining its more precise focus on certain violent acts: staff assault, fight/assault with a weapon and multi-offender fight/assault. These violent acts result in an enhanced staff response, including loss of privileges for both the offender who committed the violent act (perpetrator) as well as the offenders who influenced their behavior (close associates). OPS is the first prison application of the evidence-based community Ceasefire model, a street-based group violence reduction strategy. Several other state correctional agencies have expressed interest in or have implemented OPS in their systems. DOC's partner in the design of OPS — the National Network for Safe Communities, out of John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York — features OPS as a promising practice on its [website](#).

DOC designed and piloted OPS in the Washington State Penitentiary's (WSP) high-security units in late 2012. A [preliminary evaluation](#) by DOC found violent acts decreased by almost 50 percent at WSP in the first year of OPS implementation. OPS was expanded to DOC's other high-security facility, Clallam Bay Corrections Center (CBCC), in late 2014.

As noted by the auditors, DOC has specific measures for OPS to evaluate its efficacy, such as the number of aggravated staff assaults. DOC appreciates the auditors noting this outcome measure and the preliminary evaluation as supporting evidence for expansion of OPS to CBCC. However, the auditors provide little context for how the targeted implementation at WSP may have contributed to a reduction of violent acts statewide. For example, in fiscal year 2012, there were 11 aggravated staff assaults statewide, and WSP accounted for 90 percent of them. There were six aggravated staff assaults in FY 2014 statewide, and WSP accounted for half of them. This equates to almost a 50 percent reduction in aggravated staff assaults statewide and a 70 percent reduction at WSP. See Table 1.

**Table 1. FY 2012 and FY 2014 Violent infractions with staff assault type breakout**

FY 2012				FY 2014			
Facility	Violent Infractions*	Aggravated Staff Assaults**	Staff Assaults	Facility	Violent Infractions*	Aggravated Staff Assaults**	Staff Assaults
DOC***	1934	11	153	DOC***	1827	6	125
AHCC	240	0	5	AHCC	206	0	5
CBCC	129	0	5	CBCC	163	0	6
CCCC	26	0	0	CCCC	15	0	0
CRCC	331	0	6	CRCC	307	0	2
LCC	30	0	1	LCC	56	0	3
MCC	244	0	59	MCC	252	3	48
MCCCW	19	0	0	MCCCW	28	0	1
OCC	30	0	2	OCC	21	0	1
SCCC	157	0	12	SCCC	161	0	18
WCC	241	1	21	WCC	216	0	18
WCCW	99	0	5	WCCW	106	0	6
WSP	388	10	37	WSP	296	3	17

\* Top eight violent infractions are guilty and reduced findings for the following WAC Violations: 502 - AGGRAVATED ASSAULT/INMATE, 505 – FIGHTING, 602 - POSSESS WEAPON, 604 - AGGRAVATED ASSAULT/STF, 611 - SEXUAL ASSAULT STAFF, 633 - ASSAULT/OFFENDER, 635 - SEXUAL ASSAULT/OFFENDER, 704 - ASSAULT (ASSAULT STAFF)

\*\* Aggravated staff assaults are those that involved staff injury or hospitalization, or the use of a weapon.

\*\*\* DOC agency-wide totals include staff assaults and aggravated staff assaults

DOC also has a system to track the use of the enhanced response at both CBCC and WSP to monitor OPS activities. See Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Enhanced Response Tracker for OPS**

The screenshot shows the 'Enhanced Response Tracker' interface. At the top, there are navigation links for Prisons, WADOC, Site Links, Search Center, and iDOC. The main heading is 'Enhanced Response Tracker' with an information icon. Below this, there are three columns: 'Date of Incident', 'Prohibited Violent Act', and 'Response Packet IMRS Number'. A filter is applied to 'Facility : Clallam Bay Corrections Center (21)'. The table lists 11 incidents from 11/19/2014 to 10/8/2015, with most being 'Multi-Offender Fight/Assault' and one being 'Staff Assault'.

Date of Incident	Prohibited Violent Act	Response Packet IMRS Number
11/19/2014	Multi-Offender Fight/Assault	14-29176
3/11/2015	Multi-Offender Fight/Assault	15-32515
3/27/2015	Multi-Offender Fight/Assault	15-33010
4/11/2015	Multi-Offender Fight/Assault	15-33461
5/8/2015	Multi-Offender Fight/Assault	15-34346
5/21/2015	Staff Assault	15-34763
5/23/2015	Staff Assault	15-34834
8/8/2015	Multi-Offender Fight/Assault	15-37253
8/22/2015	Multi-Offender Fight/Assault	15-37743
10/8/2015	Multi-Offender Fight/Assault	15-39137

**Results DOC**

DOC has several performance measures specific to staff safety that are monitored through Results DOC in alignment with Results Washington. See Figure 2 for a snapshot of the Results DOC dashboard, which monitors the status of measures specific to staff safety.

**Figure 2. Results DOC dashboard — staff safety performance measures**



**Security concerns/suggestions**

As noted by the auditors, DOC monitors security concerns/suggestions as well as their status. See Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Security concerns/suggestions status statewide**

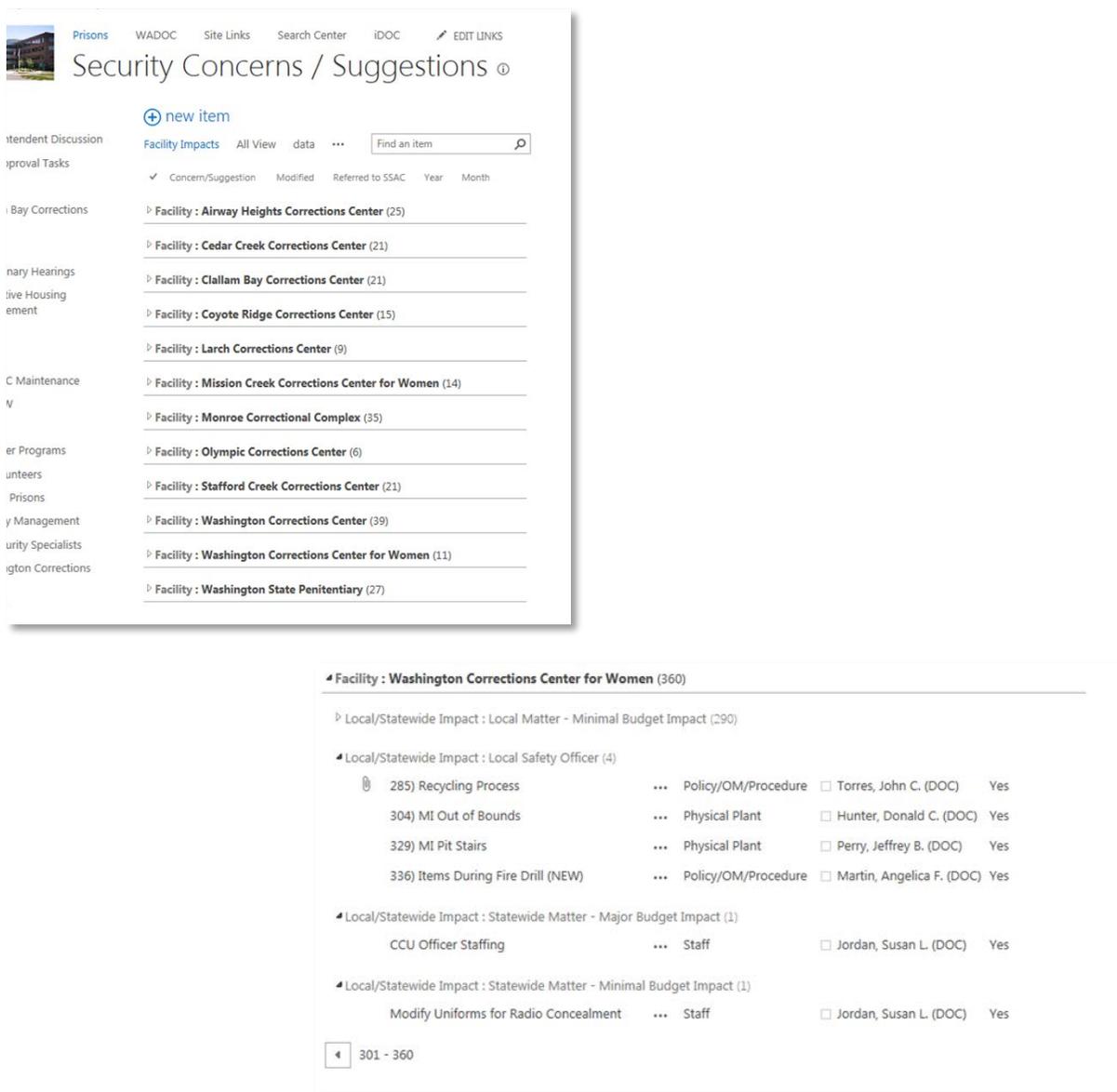
Year	Total Received	Completed at Local Level	Referred Statewide	Completed Statewide
2011	548	488	40	32
2012	714	626	39	24
2013	756	693	15	12
*2014	466	285	11	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,484</b>	<b>2,092</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>72</b>

\*As of November 2014

However, DOC’s use of security concerns/suggestions as a performance measure is more dynamic than described by SAO. For example, in addition to measuring the number of security concerns/suggestions and their status, DOC assesses the types of resolution received with each individual suggestion or concern, the timeliness of the responses, the complexity of the items and the relative resources required to address each item. Each of the security concerns, steps taken and

resolutions are viewable by all staff in the Prisons Division. See Figure 3 below for a display of security concerns tracking, along with details to monitor their status.

**Figure 3. Security concerns/suggestions screenshot with drill-down**



### **Annual employee survey**

The department conducts an annual employee survey and, in 2013, specific questions were added on staff safety. These questions ask staff to assess the following statements:

- My workplace has meaningful discussions on how to improve security/staff safety.
- I know how to report safety and security hazards or concerns.
- Security practices have been improved in my work area.

These questions remain part of the annual employee engagement survey. The survey results are used to plan meaningful, achievable goals and initiatives to support employee engagement. As a result of more focused efforts to improve employee participation in the survey, 84 percent of

DOC employees responded to the 2015 survey, and there were more positive responses to the staff safety questions than in the previous year. This contradicts conclusions drawn from the SAO's own survey of DOC employees. The SAO survey received only a 20 percent response rate, and the audit inexplicably concludes that higher response rates would have resulted in less-positive results. DOC survey results for the past three years are shown in Appendix B.

### ***Place safety musters***

Place safety musters were inspired by the success of the security forums (2011–12) which increased communication on security and safety issues in work areas at all facilities. A description of the security forum structure is shown in Appendix C. Place safety musters are held monthly and support the department's culture of staff safety. They formalize the expectation that supervisors meet with all employees who interact and work in their areas; strongly encourage individuals to voice their concerns and vulnerabilities in small multidisciplinary focus groups; and provide a recognized/formalized forum to facilitate such discussions. DOC created Policy 420.010 in 2012 to support this practice and provide supervisors the structure and time to develop staff awareness on personal safety and the safety of others. Several job aids, such as "Safety on the Line" pocket guides, which emphasize good security routines, and vulnerability exercise workbooks designed to capitalize on current and enhanced safety practices were created as part of this initiative.

The status of DOC security initiatives is captured in an annual report to the Legislature. See Appendix D for the 2015 report.

### **Action Steps and Time Frame**

- DOC will explore additional performance measures specific to the staff safety initiatives for inclusion in its performance measurement system. *By Oct. 1, 2016.*
- DOC will explore opportunities to use results from the staff safety questions in the annual employee survey to enhance the staff safety initiatives. *By Oct. 1, 2016.*

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### **SAO Recommendation 4:** Improve staff communication about safety issues. To do so:

- a. Provide additional guidance and training to facilitators to improve the effectiveness of the place safety musters, and local and statewide safety advisory committees.
- b. Evaluate whether the benefit of re-establishing shift musters, which allow staff the opportunity to communicate about potential safety concerns before beginning their shift, outweigh the additional staff time and expense it would incur.
- c. Provide more specific guidance for the role of security specialist to ensure good communication occurs on staff safety issues at the facilities, including ensuring staff receive feedback on the status of their staff safety suggestions.

### **STATE RESPONSE:**

DOC agrees with the SAO on the importance of effective communications, and has resources dedicated to engaging and informing staff through a variety of mediums. As the auditors note, DOC published "Keeping Prisons Safe: Transforming the Corrections Workplace" so staff could consider safety models from other fields in the corrections area, and its accompanying field guide,

which offers exercises and discussion guides for putting theories about safety into action. The book and field guide are used as a foundation for the prison safety curriculum. DOC also appreciates the auditors' review of strengths and weaknesses associated with place safety musters and security advisory committees, which presents an opportunity to improve the facilitation of these communication structures. For contents of these publications, see Appendix Items E and F.

### ***Security advisory committees***

Security advisory committees, which comprise local and statewide committees, empower facility staff to identify security gaps and provide avenues for addressing them.

Local security advisory committees (established by all 12 prisons in 2011) meet monthly. These committees are chaired by facility captains or lieutenants, and include staff from various disciplines who discuss security concerns/suggestions submitted by staff.

The statewide security advisory committee (established in June 2011) meets regularly to evaluate security concerns/suggestions that may affect department policy or require legislative funding. The committee's work includes evaluating and making recommendations or taking action on security concerns affecting statewide policies or practices, as well as assisting in the development of an additional safety curriculum presented to staff during the annual in-service training for the Prisons Division.

The security concerns/suggestions and their status are viewable by all staff in the Prisons Division.

### ***Shift musters***

As the auditors note, shift musters were eliminated due to a legal settlement. Currently, staff have a 10-minute "pass-down" (opportunity to share information) with each other as they exchange equipment. There is also a prescribed list of items each staff member checks at the beginning and throughout a shift to stay informed. DOC is interested in exploring additional communication structures, such as shift musters, to improve communication on staff safety.

### ***Security specialists***

Every facility has at least one security specialist. These staff members are responsible for post orders coordination, staff accountability management, place safety muster tracking, security concern/suggestion tracking and quality assurance. They also take a lead role in facilitating local security advisory committee meetings. These responsibilities and duties are addressed in position descriptions for security specialists at each facility. As such, DOC feels that supporting the role of security specialists will improve communication in a number of ways.

## **Action Steps and Time Frame**

- DOC will explore ways to improve communication structures such as place safety musters, as well as local and statewide security advisory committees. *By Oct. 1, 2016.*
- DOC will conduct a fiscal analysis of the costs associated with re-establishing shift musters. *By May 30, 2016.*
- DOC will re-affirm the role of the security specialist in alignment with the position description and related policies. *By Dec. 1, 2016.*