



OFFICE OF THE
OMBUDS FOR CORRECTIONS

House Public Safety Committee Interim Meeting

<https://mn.gov/obfc/>

Margaret Zadra, Ombudsperson for Corrections

December 17, 2024

Promote the highest attainable standards of competence, efficiency, and justice in the administration of corrections.

Minnesota Statute 241.90

Separate and independent from the Department of Corrections

Our role:

- Review and investigate concerns from incarcerated people, staff, and community.
- Address systemic issues.
- Facilitate resolutions, make recommendations, and publish reports.
- Provide education and information to help navigate the corrections system.

Objectives

| | |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| Provide | Oversight |
| Promote | Efficiency and Justice |
| Enhance | Equity and Fairness |
| Increase | Health and Safety |



Key Trends in Complaints and Investigations

- Complaint volume is up almost 75% from 2023.
- More than 100% increase in in-depth investigations.

Rising complaint volume is driven by:

- Greater awareness of OBFC's mission.
- Improved access for incarcerated individuals.
- Expanded staffing provided increased ability to provide resolutions.

| Time period (Year to Date) | Complaints |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| 2024 | 829 |
| 2023 | 481 |
| 2022 | 366 |

Priorities and Trends

To effectively manage resources amid increasing complaint volumes, the office prioritizes cases that involve:



Health



Safety



Actions or policies that
affect many people



Unexpected Consequences of Disciplinary Charges

Unexpected Consequences of Disciplinary Charges

Over the years incarcerated individuals have shared concerns with the OBFC about unexpected consequences related to disciplinary charges.

Impact on
family
connections

Restrictions on
visits and
phone calls

Program
access

Barriers to
completing
required
programs

Key Observations from Review

Impact

- Many individuals reported they would have chosen a disciplinary hearing if they had known about these additional impacts.
- Collateral consequences of discipline are significant because family support decreases misconduct.

Findings

- Discipline was adjudicated properly and aligned with existing policies.
- Staff evaluate multiple factors to ensure facility safety and may not be able to share information about safety risks with an individual.
- Current punitive and restrictive consequences may not reflect security needs.

Result

- Clear need for policy updates to address unintended consequences.

Internal Recommendations

Recommendation for DOC to review policies for:

- Non-contact visiting restrictions.
- Video visiting restrictions.
- Phone restrictions.

Ensure policies are **clear and transparent** about potential consequences of disciplinary actions.





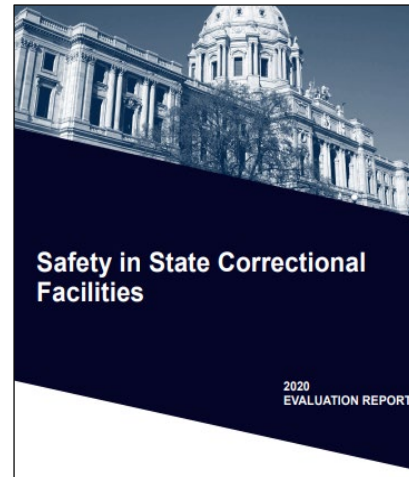
State Correctional Facilities Security Audit Group Update

State Correctional Facilities Security Audit Group

The State Correctional Facilities Security Audit Group **helps ensure safe and secure conditions in Minnesota's state prisons.**



Created by the Legislature in response to significant safety concerns in Minnesota prisons. [Minn. Stat. § 241.021 Subd. 1h.](#)



The [2020 report by the Office of the Legislative Auditor](#) highlighted the importance of external oversight of prison safety.

- Establish and update security audit standards for state prisons.
- Make critical safety and security recommendations to the DOC Commissioner.
- Review audit reports from the Department of Corrections Inspection and Enforcement Division.
- Report security standards to the Minnesota Legislature.



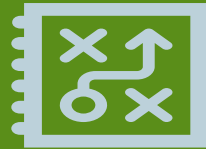
Security Audit Group Statutory Updates

Statutory updates effective August 1, 2024, that enhance the group's effectiveness.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Meeting flexibility | Group must now meet at least twice per year and can review multiple audits at each meeting |
| Expanded Membership | Additional members enhance expertise and representation |
| Designation of a chair | Allows for better group facilitation |
| Closed meetings clarification | Clarifies meetings are exempt from open meeting laws because the group reviews security information. |

Powerful Tool for Improving Security

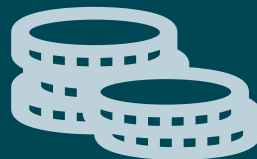
The updated
State Correctional
Facilities Security
Audit Group helps
identify and
highlight:



Creative remedies that facilities use to address security needs.



Opportunities to collaborate with and share successful strategies with other facility leadership.



Needs for training, staffing and external resources.

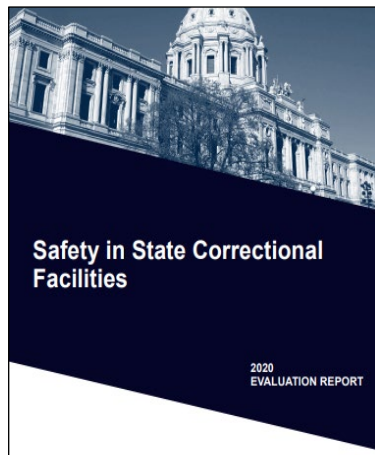


Crumbling Conditions Report

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Addressing Minnesota's Prison Infrastructure Crisis

Minnesota prisons have been under-resourced for decades, resulting in crumbling, unsafe facilities.



[OLA 2020 report](#) identified an urgent need for:

- a **comprehensive strategy and funding for infrastructure**
- and **safety improvements** in Minnesota prisons.



Immediate action is needed to:

- **Dedicate resources** for upgrades and maintenance.
- **Replace facilities** that are unsafe and beyond repair.

Statewide Infrastructure Challenges



Every Department of Corrections (DOC) facility has significant needs:

- Roof leaks, flooding, and water infrastructure issues.
- Structural concerns like tuckpointing, outdated materials, and inaccessible replacement parts.



High-risk facilities:

- MCF-St. Cloud and MCF-Stillwater have outdated designs, increasing safety risks.
- Estimated replacement cost for MCF-St. Cloud is now ~\$1 billion due to inflation.



Deferred maintenance costs totaling almost three quarters of a billion dollars, with delays further increasing expenses.

Impact of Degraded Facilities



For staff

- Challenging working conditions, forced overtime, and increased stress.
- Resources diverted to mitigate issues like standing water.



For incarcerated people

- Increased violence, stress, and trauma.
- Reduced programming, opportunities for rehabilitation, and therapeutic needs.



For vulnerable populations

Aging individuals and those with chronic illnesses or mental health issues face disproportionate challenges in outdated facilities.



Recommendations for Action

Infrastructure Solutions:

- Legislative task force to develop a multi-phase, long-term plan addressing all DOC facilities.
- Prioritize safety, security, and programming needs.

Population Reduction Initiatives:

- Investments in work release, elder/medical release, and sentencing reviews.
- Support the Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act.

Targeted Investments:

- Ensure resources are effectively utilized to preserve public safety and human dignity.

Contact

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