

# Safety in State Correctional Facilities

## ***Safety in State Correctional Facilities***

January 19, 2021

## **Key Concerns**

- Lack of information
- Staffing shortages
- Workplace culture
- Minimal outside oversight
- Outdated infrastructure

# Safety in State Correctional Facilities

## Minnesota's Prison System

Level 2	Togo, Willow River (boot camps) Adjunct units at four other prisons
Level 3	Faribault, Lino Lakes, Moose Lake
Level 4	Rush City, St. Cloud, Stillwater
Level 5	Oak Park Heights
Special	Shakopee (women), Red Wing (juveniles)

## People

- 9,200 prisoners in January 2020
  - Most have been convicted of violent crimes
- 3,700 staff in January 2020
  - 2,100 security staff (officers, lieutenants)

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5

## Measuring safety is difficult

- DOC does not formally measure safety
- Data on violent incidents are poor
- DOC's biennial reports omit fights between prisoners
- Some violence is unobserved and unreported

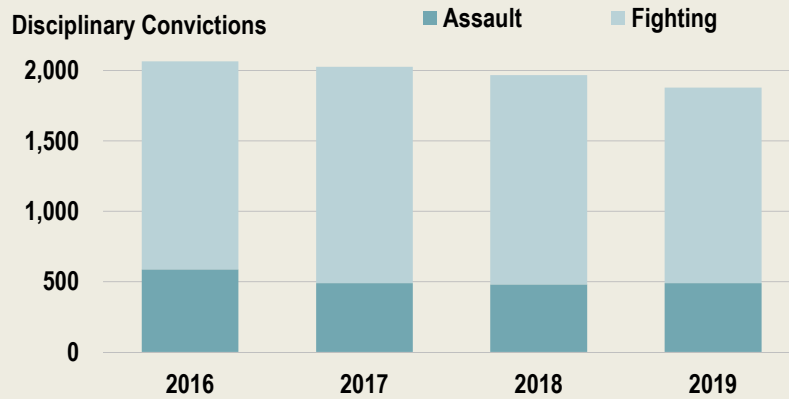
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6

# Safety in State Correctional Facilities

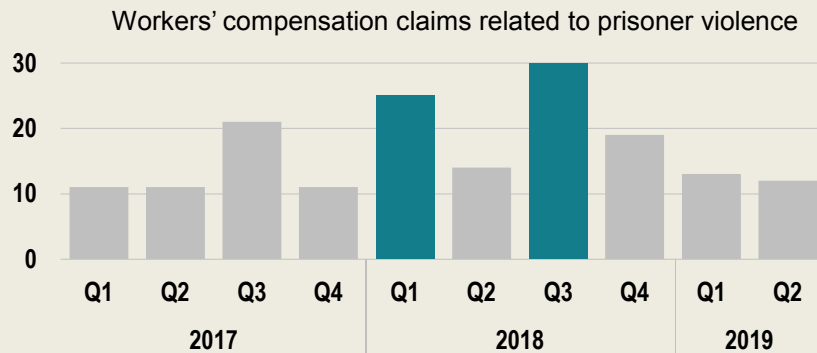
## Broad trends

Violence between prisoners has declined slightly



## Broad trends

Violence against staff spiked in 2018



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9

## Staffing shortages

- Acute shortages at specific prisons: Stillwater, Faribault, Oak Park Heights
- Stillwater was 40 staff below its allocation of 314 budgeted positions near the end of FY2019
- DOC does not track how often its prisons do not meet shift staffing targets

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10

## Staffing shortages may affect safety

- Limited ability to monitor prisoners
- Staff working alone or in small numbers
- Increased tensions when prisoners are frequently confined to cells
- Running at minimum: no slack for “unplanned” events

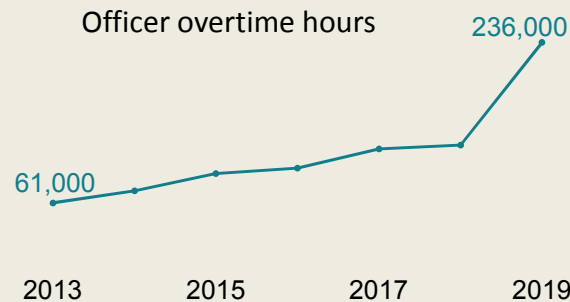
## Staffing shortages affect prisoner activities

- Research links structured prisoner activities to:
  - Less violence in prison
  - Fewer crimes committed after release
- Staff and prisoners said providing activities consistently would improve safety
- DOC does not track how often cancellations occur

# Safety in State Correctional Facilities

## Heavy overtime use

- Officer overtime has nearly quadrupled since 2013
- Prisons often force officers to work overtime
- Staff overwhelmingly agree that high overtime affects job performance



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13

## Staffing recommendations

DOC should:

- Continue efforts to improve hiring and retention
- Increase minimum staffing levels for shifts
- Begin tracking extent of:
  - Staffing shortages
  - Forced overtime use
  - Cancellation of prisoner activities

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14

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15

## Bullying and harassment among staff

- One in three said bullying and harassment is a problem
  - 40 percent of female and African American staff
  - Across all prisons and job categories
- Some told us stories of retaliation, sometimes by direct supervisors

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16



## Decisions not tied to evidence

- Administrators rely on subjective, informal impressions
- Reactions to high-profile incidents drive policy change
- Little systematic evaluation of past decisions
- Decision making limited by DOC's data weaknesses

## Workplace culture recommendations

DOC should:

- Take strong actions to address bullying and harassment among staff
- Move toward more systematic, data-driven decision making

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19

## Oversight

- Little systematic oversight
- DOC does not license its prisons—unlike county jails
- Voluntary “security audits”
  - Peer reviews of security procedures
  - Infrequent
  - Recommendations not binding

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20

## Oversight recommendation

The Legislature should require external assessments of prison safety using defined standards, by either:

- Requiring licensure, or
- Mandating security audits

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## Old infrastructure

- St. Cloud and Stillwater prisons are over 100 years old
- Living units create safety challenges that affect prisoners and staff



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23

## Infrastructure recommendation

DOC should present a long-term plan to the Legislature for the rehabilitation or replacement of St. Cloud's and Stillwater's living units

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24

# Safety in State Correctional Facilities

## Information recommendation

DOC should transform its data collections processes, particularly regarding:

- Violent events
- Staffing and overtime
- Prisoner participation in activities
- Prisoner discipline

## *Safety in State Correctional Facilities*

[www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us](http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us)