



MAURA T. HEALEY
Governor

KIMBERLEY DRISCOLL
Lieutenant Governor

TERRENCE M. REIDY
Secretary

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety & Security
Department of Correction
50 Maple Street, Suite 3
Milford, MA 01757
Tel: (508) 422-3300
www.mass.gov/doc



SHAWN P. JENKINS
Interim Commissioner

KELLEY J. CORREIRA
CHRISTOPHER NICHOLS
MITZI S. PETERSON
THOMAS J. PRESTON
Deputy Commissioners

September 25, 2024

Dennis Martin
President, Massachusetts Correction Officers Federated Union
159 S. Main Street
Milford, MA 01757

Dear President Martin and Executive Board Members,

I am writing to reaffirm our shared commitment to the health, safety and well-being of our correction officers, a priority we cannot compromise. I recognize that our officers have the critical responsibility to maintain the security and safety of all individuals in our facilities, including themselves. I also recognize that fulfilling this responsibility, particularly within the Souza-Baranowski Correctional Center (SBCC), presents unique and significant challenges. I appreciate the dedication and daily sacrifices of our 2,672 correctional staff, including the 515 currently assigned at SBCC.

My thoughts and support remain with the five officers injured during the September 18th incident as they continue to heal and recover.

The recent assaults on correctional officers are deeply troubling and underscore the urgent need for a proactive, collaborative, and strategic approach to addressing safety concerns. As we have discussed, I want to assure you and your members that the Department is committed to taking concrete steps to mitigate security risks and foster a safe working environment for all staff and those entrusted to our care and custody.

Working together, we will continue to focus on several key areas and offer this update about ongoing initiatives, including:

1. **Enhanced Safety Measures and Comprehensive Security Assessment:** The DOC is conducting a full security assessment of SBCC, including analyzing operational search procedures, the effective use of specialized units, and the origins of manufactured weapons.

SBCC has remained in modified operations since the September 18th incident. In addition to daily operational searches for secreted contraband, a Special Operations Team has been deployed to conduct multiple targeted searches of problematic units.

In addition, we are reviewing the performance of daily operational searches within the maximum-security facility to identify ways to increase their effectiveness.

As of September 23rd, the DOC has increased resources at SBCC, adding specialized staff to the facility for the day and evening shifts. These highly trained units will assist facility staff by responding to disruptive incidents and will continue to conduct facility searches to uncover any secreted contraband. Specialized staff will remain in place until October 1, at which time we will reevaluate the need.

The Department is examining the origin of confiscated weapons manufactured by incarcerated individuals this year. This review will aid the Department's ability to address and mitigate future weapon production to enhance safety for those who work and live at our facilities.

The Department's implementation of the Body-Worn Camera Program continues to support overall security measures. BWC programs enhance situational awareness, reduce liability, and support investigations by providing video documentation during critical incidents. A 2019 study assessing the implementation of BWCs in Florida correctional settings found a 42% reduction in staff assaults, a 51% reduction in reactionary use of force incidents, and a 70% reduction in allegations of excessive force. I expect that we will see similar reductions over time as our BWC program remains in place.

Amid the state's historically low incarceration and recidivism rates, the Department continues to identify ways to enhance operations, reduce redundancies, and strategically allocate staffing resources to maximize the system's effectiveness, efficiency, and safety. Since the DOC concluded operations at MCI-Cedar Junction in June of 2023 and closed MCI-Concord in July 2024, the percentage of forced overtime across the entire DOC decreased by 8%. This reduced overtime reflects improved staffing allocation and contributes to increased officer health and wellness.

2. **Collaboration with Law Enforcement Partners:** The DOC is proactively working with our law enforcement partners, including the Worcester County District Attorney's Office, to pursue criminal charges against the incarcerated individuals involved in the deeply upsetting and disturbing attack on our correction officers.

In addition, the DOC also maintains strong working relationships with law enforcement agencies to deter, detect, and intercept drugs and contraband from entering our facilities. The development of the DOC/Massachusetts State Police Narcotics Task Force strengthens efforts to thwart the presence of illicit drugs, weapons, and other contraband, a persistent challenge in correctional settings nationwide. Our DOC investigators meet regularly with federal partners, including the FBI, DEA, ATF, and U.S. Attorney's Office, and routinely consult our District Attorney's Offices while investigating criminal cases.

3. **Increased Training:** Working with the Division of Staff Development and the Academy staff, we continue to ensure that our staff and recruits are equipped with the latest techniques in self-defense and de-escalation.
4. **Incarcerated Population Rehabilitation and Programming Implementation:** DOC's advancement of its rehabilitative mission is essential to fostering an environment that promotes accountability, personal growth, and safety. Effective rehabilitative programming reduces recidivism and contributes to a safer environment by encouraging positive behavior and reducing tensions within facilities. It is also imperative that DOC comply with legislative mandates under criminal justice reform.

The implementation of tablets continues to strengthen the Department's delivery of meaningful programs to advance rehabilitation and support successful reentry. Since January 1, 2024, DOC data indicates the incarcerated population has accessed nearly 200,000 hours of programming department-wide, including over 32,000 hours at SBCC. This data reflects 200,000 hours of structured, constructive time for the

population. In addition to enhancing access to educational and vocational programming, tablets have an essential role in reducing idle time for incarcerated individuals. As of January 1, 2024, the DOC has discovered that approximately 35 of the 4,650 (less than .8%) of the tablets have been misused. DOC leadership will soon meet with representatives from our tablet provider, Orijin, to discuss any emerging issues and explore additional safety measures.

5. **Collaboration with Union Leadership:** Your input is invaluable, and we look forward to continued communication and collaboration. In our regularly scheduled meetings and daily communications, we will collectively identify concerns and assess effective measures to address issues.

I invite you and your team to continue to collaborate with DOC leadership on the development and refinement of our safety initiatives. DOC leadership recognizes that your insights are critical in shaping policies that will directly impact correction officer safety, and the safety of incarcerated individuals, who also benefit from measures taken to manage the relatively small number of individuals who behave violently.

Please know that the safety of your members is not just a goal but a priority. We are dedicated to creating an environment where correctional officers can confidently carry out their duties, knowing they are protected and supported by their leadership.

Thank you for your continued partnership and dedication. I look forward to working together to achieve meaningful improvements.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shawn P. Jenkins", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Shawn Jenkins
Interim Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Correction