

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON REHABILITATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES  
AND SENATE COMMITTEE ON RULES**

**Joint Committee to Study Staffing Levels and  
Employment Conditions at the Department of Corrections (SR 34, 2014)**

Thursday, August 28, 2014 at 9:00 a.m.  
Greensville Correctional Center  
901 Corrections Way, Jarratt, Virginia 23867

**MEETING SUMMARY**

**I. Introduction & Opening Remarks**

Senator Dave W. Marsden called the meeting to order and the Joint Committee members introduced themselves.<sup>1</sup> Staff at the Greensville Correctional Center (GCC) also introduced themselves and stated their positions at the facility.

**II. Presentation: Overview of Operations, Programs, and Staffing at Greensville Correctional Center (GCC)**

Colonel William Jarratt gave a PowerPoint presentation about GCC facilities, programs, and staffing. GCC, a Security Level 2/3 facility, is the Commonwealth's largest prison with approximately 3,355 beds. Its on-site facilities include two mental health units, a sex offender residential treatment unit, a bed segregation unit, a 50-bed infirmary, a 300-offender work center, a library, and four kitchens. GCC has several vocational and educational programs related to carpentry, horticulture, upholstery, graphic arts, HVAC, and GED credentials. In addition, GCC has three Virginia Correctional Enterprises shops where inmates manufacture furniture, which helps them obtain employment upon their release.

Regarding security staffing, Colonel Jarratt stated that GCC's goal is to maintain a safe environment for both staff and inmates, noting that a safe environment allows inmates to focus on rehabilitation rather than on protecting themselves. Colonel Jarratt stated that GCC lacks an adequate number of employees to achieve this goal with a normal work schedule. He explained that GCC uses an Institutional Post-Audit System to chart staffing requirements and schedule employees. He reported that typically a significant number of allotted GCC staff are unavailable, noting that, among other reasons, 10 to 33 employees are on disability leave at any given time. Colonel Jarratt stated that in July 2014, 43 allotted security staff positions were vacant and 79 allotted security staff members were unavailable (either attending training or on various types of leave).

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<sup>1</sup> The following Joint Committee members were present: Senator Kenneth C. Alexander, Donald Baylor, Senator Emmett W. Hanger, Jr., Senator Dave W. Marsden, Steve Morris, and Senator Jennifer T. Wexton. Joint Committee members Joey O'Quinn, Senator Linda T. Puller, and Sheriff Kenneth W. Stolle were absent.

Colonel Jarratt stated that GCC staffing shortages have led the Department of Corrections (DOC) to pay a significant amount of overtime wages, including \$166,000 in July 2014 alone. He explained that in scheduling employees for overtime hours, GCC first accepts volunteers and as a secondary method uses a draft system. He explained that employees may be required to work four additional hours beyond their normal shifts but must be off work at least eight hours between such shifts, with a maximum of 30 overtime hours per pay cycle. Colonel Jarratt explained that employees are compensated for overtime hours with monetary payment or, with their permission, compensation hours. He explained that a lot of overtime hours are logged by transportation staff, as GCC averages eight to 10 transportations per day, each of which requires at least two correctional officers. Joint Committee member Donald Baylor suggested that the number of officers required for such trips and other tasks under the Post-Audit System may need to be revisited.

Colonel Jarratt reported a significant rate of employee turnover and provided the following annual percentages: 21.6% of correctional officers, 8.7% of senior correctional officers, 9.3% of correctional sergeants, and 4.8% of correctional lieutenants. He stated that the average length of employment at GCC is nine years. Colonel Jarratt cited the following reasons for GCC's high turnover rate: length and timing of shifts, low pay, stress, safety concerns, weaknesses in the employee selection process, Code violations, competition with law enforcement and other security services, ineffective supervisors, lack of career prospects, lack of occupational prestige, and inadequate training or education.

### **III. Tour of Greenville Correctional Center**

Warden Eddie Pearson led the Joint Committee members on a tour of GCC.

### **IV. Stakeholder Testimony**

Thirteen current and retired DOC employees from various prison facilities across the Commonwealth testified about their employment experiences with DOC and made recommendations for staffing improvements. A common theme throughout this testimony was that staffing shortages exist in most of the Commonwealth's prison facilities. Multiple employees testified that they are often, if not always, shorthanded. The employees testified that this results in dangerous day-to-day situations. For example, one employee testified that in many instances, a single correctional officer must control an entire dining hall of 80 to 100 inmates. Another employee testified that correctional officers no longer staff the tower over the recreational yard of 300 inmates, a post that is supposed to serve as an avenue for help in case of an emergency. Several other employees also testified about other situations in which they alone are required to man certain posts that should be staffed by multiple officers. The employees voiced concern that this is dangerous and that if an attack or other disturbance occurred, "something bad could happen" before additional officers could arrive to help.

Employees in managerial positions testified that staffing shortages also prevent them from performing the duties of their positions. Specifically, managers testified that they are not able to supervise and coordinate their correctional officers because they must perform duties typically performed by lower-level staff. Employees also testified that they are often required to work additional hours beyond their scheduled shifts and come in on their days off. One employee suggested that the overtime structure and caps be reformed so that employees desiring overtime

may fill those spots, rather than forcing other employees to work who are not interested in working additional hours. The employees testified that there is simply “too much work for too few people,” which increases stress and lowers morale.

Several employees also testified that inmates are given too much control and too many amenities, noting inmates possess iPods, PlayStations, and other nonessentials. The employees asserted that the prison environment has become too therapeutic, noting staff is being asked to act more as “counselors” than as security officers. Employees further testified that in many instances inmates are not charged for wrongful conduct within the facility toward staff or other inmates but simply are asked to write a paragraph about the event as punishment, a task they often delegate to other inmates, and consequently, the offender learns nothing from the incident. One employee testified that the days of DOC’s “security, custody, and control” model are gone.

All employees testified that their pay is too low. The employees stated that despite inflation and an increase in the cost of living, income levels for DOC employees have remained the same. Several employees stated that they must work part-time jobs in addition to their employment with DOC in order to fully support their families. Several employees further stated that without decent pay, it is difficult for DOC to attract capable employees. Moreover, many suitable employees leave DOC for higher-paying jobs with the federal government, local or state law enforcement, or other security positions after obtaining their one-year certification. One employee testified that DOC is wasteful with its funds in other respects, asserting that at least one prison facility uses a Ford F250 for surveillance that gets less than 10 miles per gallon, rather than using a more fuel-efficient vehicle. The employees further testified that there are little or no incentives for productivity and that promotions are often based on favoritism.

Employees also requested that they be provided a forum for voicing their collective concerns to prison management, administration, and DOC. Several employees stated that they currently have no avenue for voicing their opinions and, instead, are penalized and experience retaliation when they speak up for themselves on matters such as the overtime draft system.

Finally, many employees testified about health concerns associated with DOC employment. Employees testified that the food available to them at work is “terrible” and has little nutritional value, which they cited as factors in weight gain, diabetes, heart problems, and other health issues. Employees noted that such health problems raise safety concerns, as employees are required to control inmates who spend much of the day exercising and lifting weights. Employees testified that the staff dining center has been closed in at least one of the Commonwealth’s prison facilities and that employees are asked to use the same water and ice dispensers as inmates. Employees asserted that this practice is unsanitary because inmates clean bowls and other items in these machines and often spit into them.

## **V. Discussion**

The meeting continued with discussion of the 2014 work plan for the Joint Committee. Among other issues, the Joint Committee discussed improving staffing numbers and conditions, along with obtaining the necessary funding, in an effort to keep state correctional facility staff and the public safe. The Joint Committee also discussed potential efforts related to the overtime issues, proper punishment for inmate threats to prison staff, the balance between "penalty" and "rehabilitation" efforts, and avenues for communication between DOC staff and administration.

## **VI. Adjournment**

There being no further business before the Joint Committee, the meeting was adjourned by Senator Marsden.