

**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)**

Wednesday, November 19, 2014 at 10:00 a.m.  
Coffeewood Correctional Center  
12352 Coffeewood Drive, Mitchells, Virginia

**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 Coffeewood Correctional Center also introduced themselves and stated their positions at the facility.

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

Warden Ivan Gilmore gave a PowerPoint presentation about CCC facilities, programs, and staffing. CCC, a Security Level II facility, opened in 1994. In its 20 years of operation, CCC has had zero escapes, one serious offender-on-offender assault, and zero serious offender-on-staff assaults. CCC was originally designed to house a maximum of 855 offenders, but now has a maximum capacity of 970 offenders and currently houses 961. The annual cost to house one offender is approximately \$22,515 and offenders remain at CCC for an average of three to four years.

Warden Gilmore explained that CCC has numerous treatment programs for offenders, including programs related to education, vocation, entrepreneurship, anger management, parenting, re-entry, and social support.

Regarding CCC's critical staffing needs, Warden Gilmore stated CCC has 26 treatment positions that need to be filled, four vacancies for caseworker and re-entry positions, and three vacancies for cognitive counselors. From January 2013 to date, the turnover rate for caseworker and re-entry positions is 56 percent and has reached 100 percent for cognitive counselors. Warden Gilmore explained that many of these employees leave CCC for higher paying jobs.

Next, Warden Gilmore stated that, due to the Commonwealth's current budget constraints on DOC, CCC is required to hold vacant 3.66 percent of its security positions, which causes inadequate staffing levels. Warden Gilmore stated that the starting salary for correctional officers at CCC is between \$30,581 and \$35,396, depending on qualifications, and that the average salary

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

is \$33,230. Warden Gilmore stated the turnover rate for 2014 is 19.54 percent, noting many of these correctional officers leave for reasons related to low pay, demanding hours and shift work, stress, complaints about supervisors, and unfitness for the prison environment and demands of the job.

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

Warden Gilmore led the Joint Committee members on a tour of CCC.

### **IV. Public Comment**

Numerous current and retired DOC employees from various prison facilities across the Commonwealth testified about their experiences with DOC and made recommendations for improvement. Most, if not all, of these employees testified that staffing levels at DOC's facilities are inadequate, which causes serious safety concerns, and that DOC is letting employees go rather than hiring more. One correctional officer testified that the Commonwealth's prisons are constantly short-handed and that correctional officers do not feel safe on the job. Testimony was presented that this leads to dangerous situations, such as two correctional officers manning a dorm pod, whereas, for safety purposes, there should be three. Correctional officers explained that, in many instances, two correctional officers are responsible for 160 to 170 inmates and that there are no officers to man the security towers on the recreational yards, both of which are unsafe. Employees testified this further leads to required overtime hours, averaging between 30 to 40 hours per month.

Several correctional officers commented on DOC's high turnover rate, opining this is largely caused by low pay. Officers testified they are required to work second jobs to support their families. Correctional officers recommended salary increases and stated the raises will pay for themselves in light of the thousands of dollars DOC will save in wasted funds toward the hiring and training of employees who leave DOC within a year for higher paying jobs. One correctional officer stated DOC places more importance on ensuring inmates have an opportunity to acquire General Education Development (GED) certificates than it places on providing adequate pay to its correctional officers.

Regarding training practices, testimony was presented that in the past, certain Virginia prisons required hopeful correctional officers to work in the prisons for approximately three months before the start of training, which provided them an opportunity to experience the prison environment and determine whether they were a suitable fit. It was suggested that reimplementation of this pre-training practice may allow the Commonwealth to diminish the amount of funds squandered on training correctional officers that quickly leave the Department. It was also suggested that DOC require correctional officers to pay for their own training and that DOC more closely tailor training to the requirements of the job.

Another correctional officer testified that supervisors do not treat them fairly and that promotions are given based on favoritism rather than merit.

### **V. Adjournment**

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