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Illinois Department
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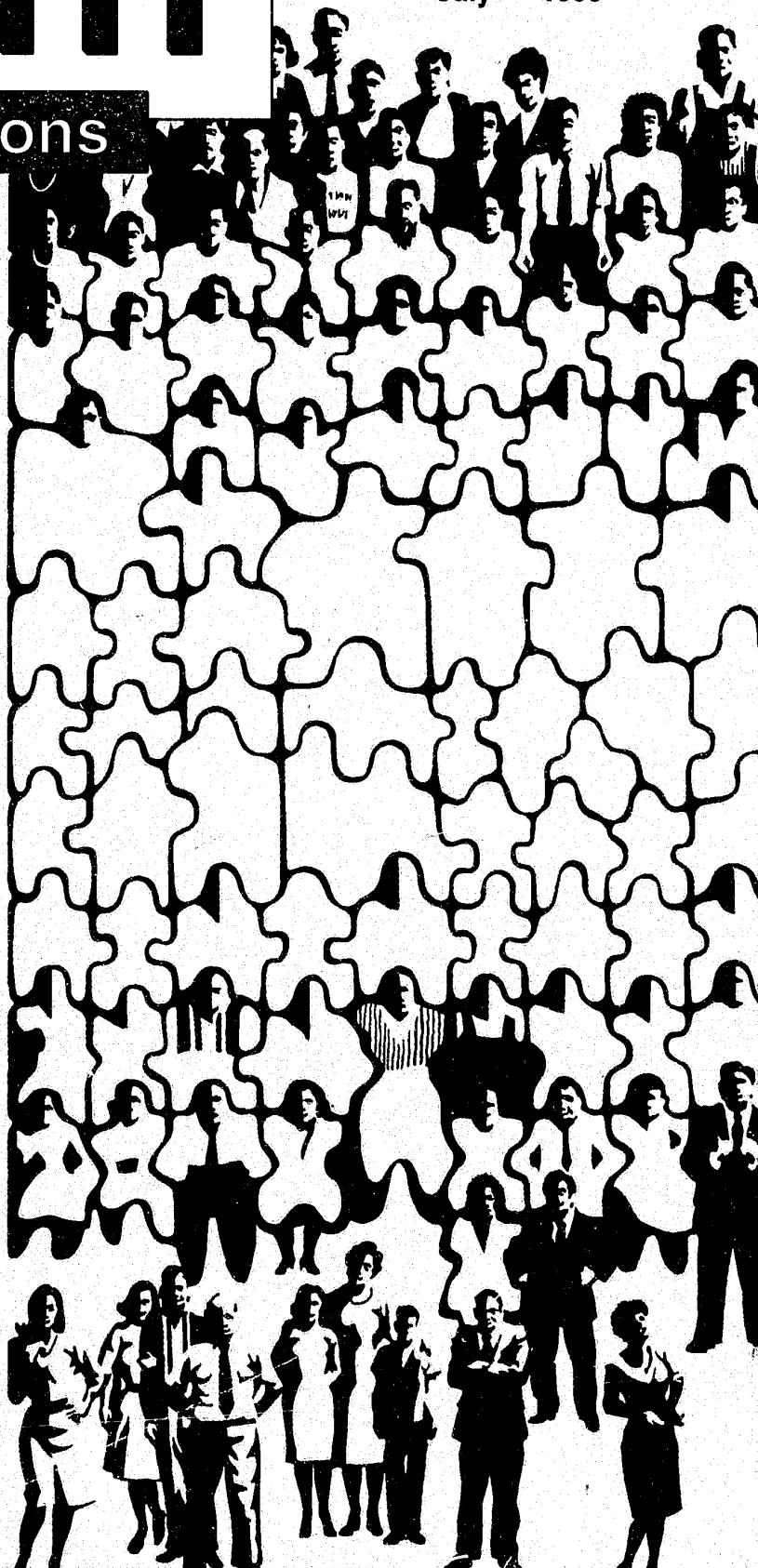
INSIGHT

into corrections

HELP WANTED

- ◆ New prison beds mean more jobs and revamping correctional officer/youth supervisor screening tests.

- ◆ Fourth Quarter Report for FY1995.



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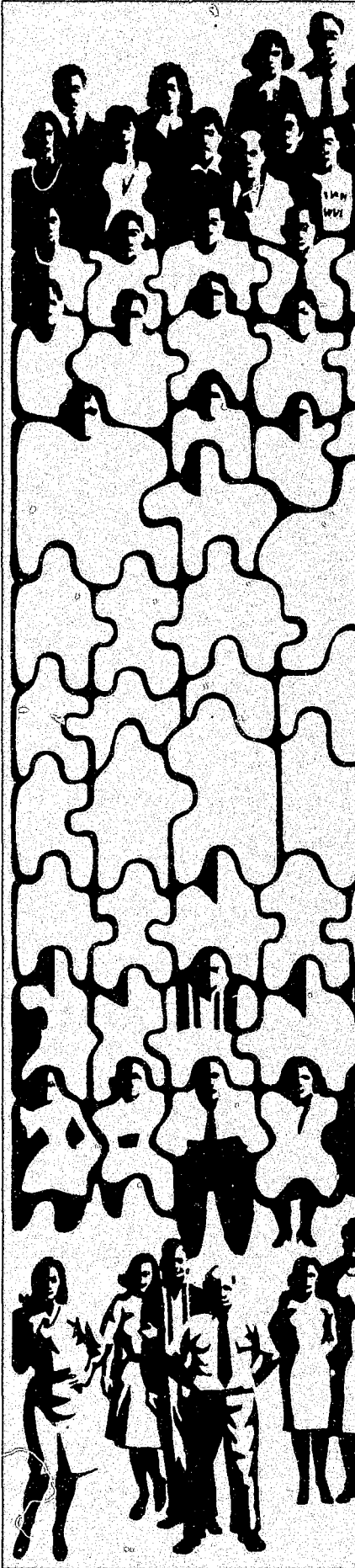
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Screening office hires thousands at prison agency

Earlier this spring the Illinois Department of Corrections hit another milestone. There was, of course, a new record set for the inmate population. But, there was another important all time high as well. A record 13,413 employees are working in facilities of the state prison agency. That's up from 11,628 just five years ago. And 3,400 more staff than the 9,986 employees in 1985.

The agency has opened 16 prisons in the last 17 years to deal with the tens of thousands of new inmates in the system. Yet, few headlines have heralded the thousands of new employees who go to work at those facilities each day. It's a tough job. And it has become tougher. Just ten years ago there were 6,020 security staff employees supervising 16,897 inmates. Today, 8,271 security staff must supervise 37,680.

An additional 416 correctional officers have been hired to bolster staffing at existing prisons under an initiative championed by Governor Edgar last year. And, hundreds of new employees will be needed to staff the 2,144 new prison beds opening in Illinois this year.

The timetable for hiring new staff to operate the 4,700 new prison beds proposed by Governor Edgar this spring is still uncertain. The bonding proposal was stalled in the Illinois House. Even though the impact of the the lost new beds is threatening to throw the prison agency into a crowding crisis by next spring, most observers agree that its not a question of "if" but "when" the new space will be built and hundreds of new staff hired to supervise the added prison beds.

And don't forget about attrition. Even at a conservative rate, replacing staff who leave the agency each year requires hiring hundreds of new employees.

While hiring new employees has been less of a crisis for the agency than dealing with the ever expanding prison population, it has been a critical management function. And, it has changed quite a bit in just the last few years.

The Department of Corrections consolidated all security officer screening and hiring functions on Nov. 1, 1990. The incentives for the move to a central screening office came from several directions. Among them was a landmark patronage lawsuit and a lack of uniformity in hiring practices at individual prisons and youth centers at the agency.

"We had to change hiring practices to prove the agency was hiring based exclusively on merit, qualifications and Affirmative Action plans. Former considerations including political referrals or other subjective methods were elimi-



"A total of 1,616 correctional officers and youth supervisors were hired ... (in the last) ... two years.

In just the first six months of 1995 we've hired nearly 700 COTs and YSTs. That's about twice the rate of hiring compared to '93 and '94," said Lynnette Jones, coordinator of the Central Screening Office.



nated from the hiring process for security officers," said Lynnette Jones, coordinator at the Central Screening Office.

Jones and her staff administer job applicant testing and hiring functions under the reorganized system.

"Historically, there has been a trend where the agency has assumed more 'in house' responsibility for the job application and hiring process. About 15 years ago, the job applicant testing process

was turned over to prisons in the system. With the Rutan lawsuit ruling, it made sense for testing

and hiring functions to be administered by the agency under a uniform set of rules by a central office," she added.

Jones claims a central hiring and screening unit is more responsive to the needs of the agency. Applicants on hiring lists can be contacted quicker when positions need to be filled, and updating lists can be done faster.

Corrections officials agree the agency now can hire new staff quickly when critical security positions are open. They also can be more flexible in meeting strategic hiring goals for the agency. With control of the process at the agency,

any changes in the system can fit better with Department of Corrections rules and policy.

"I think we've done a great job creating the hiring and screening practices now in place. We are always looking for better ideas and programs to improve the process and attract better employees," Jones said.

"We scheduled over 28,500 job applicants for testing in 1993 and 1994. More than 10,000 came to the screenings. A total of 1,616 correctional officers and youth supervisors were hired in those two years. In just the first six months of 1995 we've hired nearly 700 COs and YSTs. That's about twice the rate of hiring compared to '93 and '94," said Jones.

IDOC's inmate population projections indicate at least 50,000 inmates will be supervised by the corrections agency in the year 2000. New staff to supervise those inmates—above existing expansion and staffing plans under way or recommended by Governor Edgar—could mean an additional 1,800 to 1,900 security staff employees by the turn of the century based on current security staff to inmate ratios.

(Editor's Note: Employee increase projection based on current inmate population of 34,650 plus 2,144 beds opening in FY1996 and 4,700 beds in Governor Edgar's proposal for a total of 41,494. Subtract 41,494 from 50,000 inmate population estimate of year 2000. Remainder equals 8,506 inmates above approved and proposed prison expansion plans. 8,506 times current security staff to inmate ratio of .218 staff per inmate equals unofficial projection of 1,855 staff.)

Most corrections officials agree that new employees who can cope with the rigors of prison work will have an excellent opportunity for advancement. It's no secret in the agency that sharp correctional officers already compete strongly for posts at new prisons. The opportunity to advance up to sergeant or lieutenant, and much higher pay, can come within just a few years at these new facilities.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

"The application process itself is simple and open to all Illinois residents

by Brian Fairchild

with only a few restrictions," said Jones.

Individuals wishing to apply for a Correctional Officer Trainee position must submit the CMS-100 Employment Application to the Central Screening Office, 1301 Concordia Court, P.O. Box 19277, Springfield, Illinois 62794-9277. Upon receipt of an application, applicants receive information regarding the screening process. The initial letter to an applicant includes the date set for their screening and forms to be completed and brought to the screening.

"There are some minimum qualifications we impose based on the requirements of the job," said Jones.

Applicants are required to prove they have attained four initial criteria:

- 18 years of age;
- valid driver's license;
- Illinois resident and a U.S. citizen or authorized alien;
- and have a high school diploma or G.E.D.

"Individuals who attends a screening session should remember to bring any documentation they have to prove they qualify under these four criteria," said Jones.

SCREENING PROCESS

A team of employees trained in methods used to identify the best job applicants assists the Central Screening Office staff in administering tests. The screeners are trained extensively by the screening unit managers and work at correctional facilities all across the state. They are a great help to the central office staff who oversee the screening process. And, according to Jones, the fact that these screeners work in and understand the operations of the prison system helps them judge whether applicants may be suited to a career in the prison system.

"We recently completed what I would call 'screening for screeners.' More than 100 staff across the state were certified to conduct the thousands of applicant interviews we expect to conduct in FY1996," said Jones.

This increases the number of certified trainers available statewide to about 200.



Hundreds of corrections employees assist at job applicant screenings. Employees pictured here take the final test during a class on screening rules administered by Central Screening Unit staff at the Training Academy. These screeners come from facilities all across Illinois.

Three examinations are required of all applicants. First is the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to establish the reading comprehension and vocabulary level of the applicant. Next is a test of writing and communication skills under the inmate disciplinary report written exam. In this test an applicants ability to follow instructions, make observations and write a report is judged.

The third test measure is the physical agility test.

Applicants must meet minimum standards on each of these exams to continue onward in the screening process. Upon the satisfactory completion of these examinations, an oral interview is conducted with each applicant. Applicants have an opportunity to earn up to a total of 60 screening points and are placed on eligibility lists in rank order. Institutions hire applicants based on the total scores earned.

Weighted values are assigned to each of the seven testing categories based on the department's estimate of the value these areas contribute to good job performance.

Two additional examinations are optional. The Spanish Assessment of Basic Education and the Spanish Oral Proficiency examinations are administered to individuals who indicate they have Spanish speaking skills. Passing the Spanish examinations qualifies an individual for placement on the Spanish eligibility list. When an institution indicates there is a need to hire an individual with this skill, they may hire from this list. When hiring from this list to fill a position where Spanish skills are required, the employee is eligible to receive a \$50 per month bonus to their base pay.

• Test of Adult Basic Education

The Department of Corrections requires that all applicants for security positions successfully complete a written reading comprehension and vocabulary examination. Applicants must receive a minimum score equivalent to the tenth grade reading level. Applicants meeting this criterion can move on to the next phase in the screening process.

The TABE is used to establish a baseline for reading comprehension. No screening points are awarded for its successful completion.

• Written Inmate Disciplinary Report

In this examination applicants view a video-taped simulation of an incident that might occur while supervising inmates in the prison system. The applicant then records observations on a disciplinary report form. This examination measures individual observation and writing skills.

"These video-taped segments are professionally done, and were taped at prisons using real employees and inmates. They are a critical part of the testing procedure for several reasons," said Jones.

They give applicants a chance to see just what may happen in dealing with the inmate population, and the videos reflect the conditions within the Illinois prison system in a realistic format.

Several different videos are available for screenings so that individuals who may complete several screenings in an attempt to raise their overall scores will not have an advantage in the disciplinary report segment of the testing.

• Physical Agility Test

Being in good physical shape is a prime consideration for correctional officer and youth supervisor trainee applicants. Job applicants are required to successfully complete a physical agility test to be eligible for hire. The test is comprised of five exercises designed to measure an applicant's ability to perform job duties. Applicants must complete all five of the exercises to continue in the screening process.

A critical job function at adult and juvenile facilities is the ability to physically subdue or restrain a violent inmate if a situation demands. This task requires a hard level of exertion and may be preceded by running to the scene and, in some cases, after the employee has run up or down flights of stairs. This task requires substantial upper body strength, grip strength, good balance, agility and quickness.

"The agency has invested a lot of time and resources developing the physical

ability portion of the screening," said Jones. A contract with the Physical Education Department at Eastern Illinois University developed reliable exercises based on the actual job requirements.

The test contains five sections. The first section covers overall cardiovascular performance and the ability to climb steps. Then a hand strength test determines gripping ability necessary to fire a



"The independent evaluation of our physical ability testing by Eastern Illinois University was very important to establishing meaningful and appropriate screening guidelines," said Jones.



weapon, apply restraints or assist in subduing violent or aggressive inmates. Next, the ability to lift and carry objects of specific weight for a set distance is measured. A physical agility test then measures the applicants ability to rapidly change direction while maintaining balance and coordination. An obstacle course is set-up as part of the physical agility testing.

Finally, a push up test measures the muscular endurance of the chest, upper arm and shoulder muscles which are required in restraining, subduing and separating inmates or defending against an assault.

"The independent evaluation of our physical ability testing by Eastern Illinois University was very important to establishing meaningful and appropriate screening guidelines," said Jones.

"The research they conducted into

actual working conditions in prisons across Illinois added credibility to what physical abilities we test for — and why. We were also concerned about complying with the requirements under the Americans With Disabilities Act. They helped us develop uniform guidelines that we believe comply with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the employment provisions in the ADA," said Jones.

Physical ability tests to determine physical qualifications for jobs such as police, firefighters and security guards are permitted under Equal Employment Opportunity Guidelines if the standards are job related, according to an EIU report.

The special skills taught at the corrections Training Academy cannot be tested as part of the screening process. However, the physical capacity to be trained in these skills is an essential function of employment, according to the report.

"The Eastern Illinois University report further indicates—through a job analysis—several essential job functions which require physical effort for the positions of COT and YST. The physical ability tests measure capacities that contribute significantly to successful job performance," said Jones.

Corrections officials point out that the EIU study concluded high levels of physical effort are required of correctional officers and youth supervisors when performing some tasks that are critical to maintaining the safety of officers, inmates and the public. While these tasks may not have to be performed every day, applicants must be able to perform them when conditions demand.

• Oral Interview

Applicants who have passed tests up to this point are qualified to be interviewed by a team of two screeners using a standard interview questionnaire. Upon conclusion of the interview, the screeners independently rate the applicant based on six categories. These areas are grouped under the headings of intelligence, communication skills, judgment, interpersonal relations, supervision skills and attitude.

An applicant can receive from 0-3 points in each category for a total of 18 possible points. The average of the two screeners' scores is calculated to determine the applicant's total interview score.

Corrections officials agree the interview process is the most subjective aspect of the screening process. In an attempt to broaden the depth and ensure the fairness of this aspect of the screening process, the two screeners are teamed up based on several criteria. First, one of the screeners must be a security staff employee. An attempt is made to balance screening teams with a minority and non-minority staff member on each team.

In addition, a standard interview form is used to guide the interview process. The use of the standard format increases the chance that all relevant information will be obtained from the applicants during the interview.

"Screeners are trained to ask follow up questions and probe appropriately into the subjects we focus on. In addition, the use of this format conveys a sense of organization, thoroughness and professionalism to the applicant. That's important to the image of the agency," she said.

The oral interview enhances the screening process, according to corrections officials.

If an applicant tells a screener he wants to be a correctional officer because "somebody needs to beat-up these convicts on a regular basis — and he's the one for the job" — that tells you right there that this individual probably shouldn't be working in a correctional facility no matter what overall score is earned.

There are some facets of an individual's personality that are critical to judging whether they can work in a prison. The oral interview must be administered in an objective manner, and screening officials believe the information collected is critical to the process.

● Educational Achievement

One screening point is awarded for every increment of 15 college semester hours, or equivalent thereof, up to a maximum of eight points. Not more

Shawnee Community College offers training program assisting applicants with screening process

Recruiting staff for the new maximum security facility or 'supermax' at Tamms should be easier because of the cooperation offered by Shawnee Community College. In response to a request by the Department of Corrections and the Southernmost Illinois Prison Committee, the community college developed a pre-employment training program for persons interested in becoming correctional officers at the new prison.

The free training program is designed to assist correctional officer applicants in developing reading, report writing, interview, observation and study skills to the level of achievement needed to successfully complete the screening process.

Three Shawnee college administrators from the small business development center/adult education/literacy program and the college placement coordinator's office attended a one-day screening near East St. Louis to observe the process.

IDOC staff explained each step of the screening process to the college administrators and explained the entire screening process. After additional discussions, the Shawnee administrators and corrections officials agreed to conduct three types of workshops at the college for prospective applicants. These workshops included: A reading improvement class for applicants scoring below the acceptable level on the Test of Adult Basic Education, or TABE; writing workshops to improve observation and writing skills; and an interview workshop,

aimed at providing prospective applicants with better interview skills and organization.

Prior to any screening by corrections, applicants take an alternate form of the TABE test used by corrections. For individuals falling below the tenth grade level, a six to 10 week class is available to assist them in increasing reading skills to the required level. The reading improvement class incorporates other key elements of the screening process such as writing and observational skills.

Mock interviews are also offered. This gives the applicants a better understanding of the types of questioning to be prepared for as well as easing anxiety caused by the interview process. The proper way to complete an application is also reviewed. In addition to the interview training, a disciplinary report writing session is also conducted.

To date, 478 people have enrolled in the workshops and 393 have been tested. Eighty-five of the 246 who passed have been hired.

The workshops will be conducted until the maximum security prison is fully operational. The program has been awarded funds from the Illinois Community College Board Workforce Development project. Corrections provides in-kind funding by providing staff to assist in the workshops. An award application submitted by the college calls the program a tremendous success. And, it points to the fact the college is a distribution center for IDOC job information. □

than one bonus point may be awarded for any degree earned. For example, a bachelor's degree with 120 hours of college credit would be awarded a score of nine points. An applicant with 120 hours of college credit who earned an associate's degree first and a bachelor's degree later would earn the same nine screening points. Documentation of college credits must be supplied through transcripts or diplomas before awarding points in this category.

• **Work Experience**

Screening points are awarded for law enforcement, security and corrections experience completed in good standing. One point is awarded for each documented one-year period, not to exceed three points.

Points may also be awarded for employment in jobs not directly related to law enforcement, security, or corrections. The factors of job stability, supervisory experience and promotions will be assessed, not to exceed two points each for a maximum of six points.

• **Military Service**

One point is given to any armed forces veteran, receiving other than a dishonorable discharge, for each year of service and without regard to service

dates up to six points. Documentation of military service is based on a review of the DD-214 Certificate of Military Release of Discharge.

Applicants who have been in the military are entitled to work experience points as follows: security experience; one point for every year in the military beyond six not to exceed three points.

Non-security experience: two points for job stability if in the military for a period of three years or longer; two points for promotion if DD-214 reflects a rank of E-3 or above; and two points for supervisory experience if applicant supervised at least one person for a period of at least six months.

RANKING APPLICANTS FOR HIRE

Applicants may earn up to 60 total screening points. Total screening scores are based on the screening points accrued during the written exam, oral interview, and for documentation of educational achievement, work experience and military service. Applicants are then ranked in order of their screening scores from the highest to lowest. Successful completion of the screening process places an applicant on an eligibility list for hire for a period of one year from the last day of the month in which they screen. If an applicant chooses to retake the test within that time, the most

current screening score overrides the previously reported score.

Applicants may select up to three adult and three juvenile institutions at which they will accept employment.

BACKGROUND INVESTIGATIONS

A background investigation is conducted on all applicants selected for hire. This process involves inquiries via the Law Enforcement Agencies Data System (LEADS), which includes a computerized criminal history check, NCIC hot files; and Secretary of State driver's information checks. In addition, drug testing and employment reference checks are conducted.

Drug tests are required of all potential employees. The urinalysis screening tests for five drugs including marijuana, cocaine and PCP. Each test costs the department \$15.50. In addition to the 2,442 job applicants and volunteers tested last year, about 11,500 inmates, parolees and juveniles in the corrections system were given drug tests. No job applicant, volunteer, intern or contractual employee may begin work at the agency until notification of a negative drug test result has been obtained.

Physical and visual screening exams also are administered by qualified professionals. Information gathered during the background investigation phase may be considered when selecting an applicant for hire. Each applicant is required to sign a waiver authorizing the background search as a potential condition of employment.

Possible conflicts of interest will subject an applicant's file to administrative review prior to consideration for hire. An administrative review will be conducted if an applicant is a former IDOC employee, has prior convictions for other than minor traffic offenses, has relatives incarcerated within the Department of Corrections or has relatives employed by the Department of Corrections.

OTHER HIRING ISSUES

Individual correctional facilities select applicants for hire from their institutional eligibility list based on screening scores and Affirmative Action plans.

Correctional Officer Trainee and Youth Supervisor Trainee Screening Score Ranges

Test Section	Weight Assigned	Point Range
TABE Test	Pass/Fail	-
Report Writing Exam	30%	0 - 18
Physical Agility Test	Pass/Fail	-
Oral Interview	30%	0 - 18
Education	15%	0 - 09
Work Experience	15%	0 - 09
Military Experience	10%	0 - 06

When applicants receive the same overall screening score, ties are broken through a lottery. Established Affirmative Action goals may be taken into consideration when a decision is made to tender an offer of employment based on the strategic needs of the agency.

"The fact that nearly two-thirds of the inmates and juvenile delinquents under the supervision of the agency are African Americans and about 10% are Hispanic creates the need for recruitment of individuals of these races in our employment plans," said Janet Richmond, Affirmative Action Administrator for the agency.

"The fact that Affirmative Action goals coincide with strategic recruitment plans for the agency is a positive issue. It is important to note that our overall goal is to hire the very best individuals who have qualified for employment at the agency. The fact that we reach out into the community and recruit minorities is no more or less important than our effort to find the best possible applicants that we can for jobs in the agency," said Richmond.

A recent Supreme Court decision on how bids must be awarded to minority contractors may have an influence on Affirmative Action plans across the country.

However, businesses such as Motorola, NutraSweet and Commonwealth Edison have recently made statements to the news media that their organizations will continue Affirmative Action policies because of unique business opportunities such recruitment and hiring offers in global and regional markets.

SALARY AND BENEFITS

The opportunity for rapid advancement at the agency is important when considering a career in state government. However, the initial wage and benefit programs are competitive.

The starting salary for a correctional officer trainee is \$1,966 per month and the starting salary for a youth supervisor trainee is \$1,898 per month. During the three-month appointment as a trainee all correctional officer trainees and youth supervisor trainees are required to attend six weeks of instruc-

tion at the IDOC Training Academy. After three months in a trainee title, appointments are made to the position of correctional officer and youth supervisor in a probationary period for four and one half months. At that time, a correctional officer's salary increases to \$2,148 per month and a youth supervisor's salary increases to \$2,061 per month.

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The State of Illinois provides health and dental insurance with a copayment deducted from paychecks. Life insurance is provided at 100% of the employees annual salary. Security employees are eligible to retire with full retirement benefits at age 50 with 25 years of service and age 55 with 20 years of service.

Benefit time for starting employees include:

- Three personal business days are earned by each employee every year,
- 10 vacation days are awarded during the first five years of service.
- Employees earn additional vacation days the longer they are employed.

A maximum of 25 vacation days per year are awarded to employees with 25 years of service. Each employee also earns one sick day for each month of duty.

- There are also an average of 12 paid holidays awarded each year including traditional holidays and all state holidays.

- Uniforms are issued to security staff by the Training Academy.

The comprehensive package of medi-

cal, dental and life insurance benefits are an attractive incentive for prospective employees. In addition, a deferred compensation, child care and dependent care deferral option can stretch an employee's salary by diverting pre-tax income into tax deferred status to help pay medical costs and expand retirement benefits.

The retirement package is similar to the benefits offered Illinois State Police Officers. The potential to reach retirement age and benefit levels nearly a decade before other state employees is a recognition of the difficult work done by corrections employees.

SCREENING RESULTS

From January 1, 1993, to December 31, 1994, a total of 28,553 applicants were scheduled for testing during 28 screenings.

In all, 10,123 applicants were examined.

Overall, of the 10,123 who showed up for the tests, 4,646 (46%) successfully completed the three pass/fail tests on physical agility, educational ability and disciplinary report writing.

These 4,646 individuals were granted an oral interview, given a total score and placed on the eligibility lists.

A higher percentage of females than males failed the physical agility test (30% of the females compared to 19% of the males), and 29% of the females failed the TABE test compared to 19% of the male applicants.

For the 4,646 applicants the average overall score was 30 with a high of 58.

Of the 4,646 applicants who passed all phases of the screening and were placed on hiring eligibility lists, 1,616 (35%) were hired. This is over one-third of those who passed the three-stage process. Their average score was 36.

The future of job screening work at corrections is not hard to predict. Increased demand for prison beds and staff to watch over them is probably guaranteed for at least the next decade. Maybe more.

"It's important with the increased pressure on the prison system and the additional demands on security staff that we continue to recruit and hire the best employees we can," said Jones. □