



STATE OF NEW YORK • EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT  
STATE COMMISSION OF CORRECTION

60 SOUTH PEARL STREET  
ALBANY, NY 12207

FINAL REPORT

March 23, 1984

CHAIRMAN  
J. KEVIN MCNIFF

COMMISSIONER  
KATHARINE WEBB

Superintendent James Sullivan  
Sing Sing Correctional Facility  
354 Hunter Street  
Ossining, New York 10562

Dear Superintendent Sullivan:

On December 6 through December 9, 1983, James R. Gleason and Ted P. Swiderak conducted a site visit to Sing Sing to review the impact of overcrowding upon the security, administrative, and program operations of the facility.

In carrying out the review, Commission staff gathered information and data from personal observations, records, and discussions with you, the executive staff, civilian and uniformed staff, and inmates. The following report represents an account of our observations, findings, and recommendations.

The Commission requests that you address the recommendations noted and forward your response within 30-days of receipt of this letter.

We appreciate the time, courtesy and cooperation which was extended to us during our visit. We are especially grateful to Captain Wayne Strack who provided various kinds of information re the operation of the facility.

Sincerely,

Ward DeWitt  
Executive Director

Thomas Coughlin

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FINAL REPORT

NEW YORK STATE  
COMMISSION OF CORRECTION  
ALBANY

TITLE: REPORT ON A SITE VISIT  
FACILITY: SING SING CORRECTIONAL FACILITY  
DATE: DECEMBER 6-9, 1983

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National Institute of Justice

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SING SING CORRECTIONAL FACILITY  
OSSINING, NEW YORK

DECEMBER 6-9, 1983

A) INMATE POPULATION

On the day of this review, facility records indicated that the maximum prisoner capacity, as established by D.O.C.S. was 2,240 (including Tappan). On December 5, 1983, the population totaled 2,218, classified in the following categories:

General Confinement- - - - -	1,302
Transient Inmates- - - - -	712
Parole Violators - - - - -	128
Plus (Absconders, etc.)- - - -	22
N.Y. Court Detainees - - - - -	54
TOTAL- - -	2,218

By Housing Area:

Housing Block A- - - - -	680
Housing Block B* (Transient)- -	614
#5 Building- - - - -	280
#7 Building- - - - -	78
Housing Block C	
(Special Housing)- - - - -	56
#9 Building (Tappan) - - - - -	186
#10 Building (Tappan)- - - - -	137
#11 Building (Tappan)- - - - -	153
Hospital - - - - -	15
Satellite Unit - - - - -	14
Outside Hospital - - - - -	5
TOTAL- - -	2,218

\*Some transient inmates are housed outside of Housing Block B because of crowding in this area.

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B) UNASSIGNED INMATES

The Sing Sing Correctional Facility is experiencing problems with programming its inmate population due to overcrowding. At the time of the site visit, Commission staff found approximately 200 inmates in unassigned status, who are part of the general confinement populations of both Sing Sing and Tappan. Time spent in unassigned status ranged from two to six weeks, depending upon the availability of program slots, according to facility officials.

Although this number reflects those inmates in unassigned program status, Commission staff found that certain activities and basic services are available to these inmates to reduce their idle time. Recreation, volunteer in-house work projects, law library, counseling, religious services, visiting, and cell study activities are provided to all unassigned inmates.

With the completion of construction of new vocational shops expected by late spring, all inmates should be assigned to a formal program, even if only on a half-day basis.

RECOMMENDATION

- The facility should maintain its efforts to provide a full program day to general population inmates within two weeks of admission.

C) TRANSIENT POPULATION

Facility population records indicated that the numbers of transient inmates has been considerably reduced during the past year. At the time of the site visit, there were approximately 700 transient inmates, as compared to 1,100 one year ago. Although this figure is still high, efforts continue to achieve the Department's goals of transferring sixty (60) inmates per week. According to the Superintendent, if the 60 transfers-per-week goal was reached, the number of transient inmates could be reduced to approximately 600, or the number who can be housed exclusively in Housing Block B. However, the Superintendent acknowledged that, due to general overcrowding throughout the State system, this target is not always met. Commission staff determined that stays in transient status average four (4) to six (6) months for inmates classified as maximum security. Transient stays for those inmates with less than a maximum security classification average approximately two (2) to four (4) weeks.

The Administration presently houses transient inmates in Housing Block-B, and has converted Housing Block-A to a general confinement block. According to staff, this system has proved to be very successful in managing the movement of inmates to programs and services. Due to overcrowding, however, it is necessary to house overflow transients in other housing units. At the time of the site visit, there were approximately 100 transient inmates housed outside of Housing Block-B.

RECOMMENDATION

- The Administration and the Department should strengthen their efforts to reduce the stay of transient inmates prior to transfer by meeting the Department's goal of sixty (60) transfers per week.

D) STAFF-INMATE RELATIONS AND RELATED CONCERNS

During the evaluation period, Commission staff toured virtually all areas of the Sing Sing Correctional Facility, including Tappan. In doing so, particular attention was directed to the following issues:

- a. how the custody and program staff viewed the administrative staff;
- b. inmate/staff rapport; and
- c. impact of the new administration on the mid-level and line personnel.

Commission staff observed that virtually all feedback was very positive and supportive of the new administration. Nearly all individuals contacted displayed initiative and willingness to contribute to resolving any outstanding problems.

Rapport between inmates and staff was viewed as being satisfactory. During the evaluation period, no inmate/officer conflicts were observed nor were any complaints of inmate mistreatment reported to the Commission staff.

Interviews with the Administration, training staff, and a Union representative did reveal certain concerns regarding staff turnover, a high number of on-the-job training staff, and a lack of officer housing.

1. Permanent and O.J.T. Staff Turnover

In the area of staff turnover, facility personnel records indicate that during the payroll period of January 1 to December 5, 1983, 697 security employees were transferred

from Ossining. This represents an average of approximately 63 officers per week who transferred out.

Correction Officers-	- - - - -	652
Sergeants-	- - - - -	29
Lieutenants-	- - - - -	15
Deputy Superintendent of Security-	- - - - -	<u>1</u>
TOTAL		697

According to the Training Division, a large volume of O.J.T. officers are transferred to Sing Sing Correctional Facility for two weeks to complete their O.J.T. Program. At the completion of their O.J.T. at Sing Sing, most of these officers are made permanent in their positions. From January 3 to December 22, 1983, a total of 1,007 officers completed their on-the-job training program at this facility. This represents an average of eighty four (84) officers per month.

The high rate of officer turnover, coupled with the large percentage of O.J.T. staff, continually leaves the facility in a state of transition and instability. Further, facility staff acknowledged that the effective implementation of administrative policies and procedures can be difficult due to their uneven interpretation and inconsistent application by inexperienced staff.

2. Security Staff/Experience

The line of correction officer staffing was reported to be satisfactory. Information obtained from facility officials revealed the following:

CORRECTION OFFICER STAFFING

June 1983	648
July 1983	653
August 1983	707
September 1983	747
October 1983	694
November 1983	731

Facility officials said that personnel has been increased in the past five (5) months for added program and security post coverage. This action followed a staff deployment analysis conducted by DOCS Central Office.

With current staff allocations, the Training Division also reported that adequate training relief was available.

Since staff is a key to the operation of a facility, further information was collected relative to the experience of the facility's security staff. Personnel information made available by facility staff for November, 1983 was analyzed and showed the following results:

<u>YEARS OF EXPERIENCE</u>	<u>NUMBER OF PERSONNEL</u>
20 - 29 years	30
10 - 17 years	85
5 - 9 years	97
3 - 4 years	32
1 - 2 years	244
Less than 1 year	248
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>736</b>

The above figures indicate that 66.8% of the facility's correction officer staff have two years or less of experience.

3. Security Staff/Absentee Rate

A barometer which is often used to gauge officer morale in a particular institution is the number of officers who

are absent due to sickness or other reasons. Information obtained from the facility's monthly reports revealed the following:

<u>MONTH</u>	<u>AVERAGE OFFICER ABSENTEEISM PER DAY</u>
June 1983	51.37
July 1983	51.25
August 1983	43.65
September 1983	37.17
October 1983	36.33
November 1983	37.35

The decrease in officer sick time by 27.3% from June to November, 1983, may suggest that the new administration has had some impact on reducing the absentee rate among the correction officer staff. The reduction also represented considerable savings on overtime which would be required to provide coverage.

4. Staff Housing

In the area of housing availability, facility officials said the Administration and the Union local have worked jointly to address this problem. Because of the high cost of living in the Westchester County area, officers experience great difficulty in obtaining reasonably priced housing. It was reported that the facility expected the arrival of modular housing units, capable of housing forty (40) staff members, provided under the Quality of Work Life Program. Commission contact with a QWLP executive revealed that the bidding process was to be finalized by January 6, 1984, and installation of the units should occur by early March, 1984.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Department, in conjunction with the facility Administration and the Union, should continue to explore ways to reduce the staff turnover rate and stabilize the facility's work force.
- In light of the high percentage of inexperienced officer staff, the facility should continue to place a high priority on providing staff with appropriate training and supervision to ensure continuity and consistency in the implementation of facility rules, policies and procedures.
- The facility administration should continue its efforts to further reduce officer absenteeism.
- The facility administration, in conjunction with the Department and the Union, should continue to address the problems of officer housing shortages in Westchester and its environs.

E. PROGRAMS

Administration officials indicated that the facility program day runs from 8:15 to 10:50 in the morning and from 12:45 to 2:50 in the afternoon. The evening program runs from 5:45 to 8:30 for a daily total of approximately seven and one half (7½) hours.

The administration recognizes a need for additional programs and program space because of the size of the population. This need has been complicated by the diverse populations which must be served: general confinement inmates, transient inmates, parole violators, New York court detainees, Tappan inmates and absconders from other medium and minimum security facilities. According to facility officials, efforts are currently underway to house certain of these population groups together in order to better utilize existing space and to facilitate the provision of programs.

All population groups assigned to Sing Sing should be provided with some form of program in the next six months when additional vocational space is constructed, according to facility officials. Under present plans, however, only half-day programs can be guaranteed to the inmate population.

1. Academic

According to the Education Supervisor, there are approximately 600 general confinement inmates involved in the academic programs as opposed to 100 earlier in the year. These programs include Adult Basis Education, Bilingual

Education, Computer Literacy, English as a Second Language, High School Equivalency, Special Housing Cell Study, and Literacy Education. In addition, college courses are offered which include associate and bachelor degree courses from Mercy College, the New York Theological Seminary, Pre-College Math and Writing Skills and the Regents External Degree Program. Program staff expect the Mercy College Program to increase its enrollment from 110 to 250 by January, 1984, because of added emphasis on the program day by the Administration.

2. Vocational

At the present time, only the Building Maintenance and Floor Covering Shops are in operation. It is planned however, that the Vocational Program will soon consist of eleven (11) shops. This will include: Air Conditioning and Refrigeration, Appliance Repair, Business Education, Drafting and Blue Print Reading, Electrical Trades, Machine Shop, Print Shop, Small Engine Repair and Welding. It is expected that these shops will employ approximately 400 inmates in half day programs. Classes will consist of approximately twenty (20) inmates in both morning and afternoon sessions.

3. Industry

An industry shop which manufactures plastic bags is available to general confinement inmates only. At present, 20 inmates participate, according to Industry staff.

4. Other

Other available programs include Arts and Crafts, Network (Tappan inmates only), Substance Abuse Counseling and the Pre-Release Program. According to administration officials there are also plans to expand the Drug and Substance Abuse Program to an enrollment of approximately 272 inmates. The inmates in this program will be separately housed in #5 Building.

5. S.T.E.P.

Programs available to the transient population are known as the Satellite Transient Education Program (S.T.E.P.) and include; Bible Study, Cell Study, Computer Literacy, Hobby Crafts, Library, Literacy Education, Music, Pre-College Math, and Substance Abuse Counseling.

It should be noted at the time of the B-Block hostage incident in January 1983, one of the priority complaints was the lack of programs for transient inmates.

Approximately 100 transient inmates who are without disciplinary difficulties may have an active job or can be involved in a regular facility program. These inmates may also be placed in "hold status" which enables them to stay in Sing Sing for a longer period of time and be eligible for possible "conversion" into the general confinement population.

Commission staff toured the transient housing block and inmates voiced no complaints regarding programs available to them.



RECOMMENDATION

- The Administration should continue to explore a means of developing additional academic and vocational programs and program space in order to provide a full program day for all inmates.

F. SERVICES

The following services are available to all inmates.

1. Service Unit

The counseling staff consists of three (3) senior counselors and ten (10) counselors. According to facility budgetary records there are presently four (4) counselor items which are vacant. Seven (7) counselors carry a case load of approximately 300 inmates each. The three (3) remaining counselors are assigned to the Special Housing Unit, Pre-Release Program, and the Hospital Satellite Unit.

Inmates have access to their assigned counselors five (5) days per week, at their request. Although this system is advantageous to the inmate, it was stated by one (1) counselor that a great deal of time is expended answering inmate inquiries that fall outside a counselor's purview or responsibility.

Counselor staff stated that other duties such as updating inmate program and security assessment reports, assisting in the preparation of cases for disciplinary hearings at the Tier II and Tier III levels, and extraordinary caseloads, have a detrimental effect on time available to attend to inmate counseling needs.

Due to space limitations, counselors are located in two separate buildings, a considerable distance from each other. Commission staff noted that this situation makes it difficult for supervision and communication to occur and prevents easy access to inmate records.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Department should fill the four (4) vacant counselor items as soon as possible and add necessary positions to enable the facility to meet the Department's recommended staffing ratio.
- The administration should study the current utilization of counseling staff with the intention of maximizing actual counseling time.
- The present situation of having counseling staff located in separate areas of the facility should be addressed. Centralization of all Service Unit staff would improve supervision of the units and facilitate intra-unit communications.

2. Health Services

During this visit, a complaint was received from the Inmate Grievance Review Committee regarding a number of grievances concerning the long waiting time for obtaining eye exams. Commission staff determined that the administration is presently in the process of obtaining the needed equipment and the services of an optometrist to resolve the situation. In the meantime, efforts are being made to locate an optometrist in close proximity of the facility to serve inmates.

3. Recreation

Each housing block has its own recreation area. Schedules for recreation periods are posted in each housing section. Recreation areas include the mess halls, Housing

Block A and B Gymnasiums. There is both structured and unstructured activities available to all inmates. Both the areas and scheduling were found to be sufficient to service the entire population at a reasonable level. At the time of the January 1983 disturbance the Housing Block gymnasiums were in the construction stages and recreation for transient inmates had been very limited. No inmate complaints were received.

4. Inmate Grievance System

A meeting was held with I.G.R.C. to elicit views on how the committee was functioning. Committee members were pleased with the fact that inmate grievances have risen from approximately fifteen (15) a month to approximately forty (40) per month. They stated that the rise in the number of grievances reflected the fact that inmates now have more confidence in the grievance resolution system than under the previous Administration. As a result, more grievances are submitted. It was said that a majority of grievances are resolved informally although exact figures could not be provided. No inmate complaints were received.

RECOMMENDATION

- While increased use of the Inmate Grievance Program is encouraging on one hand, both facility and departmental officials should thoroughly review the issues raised in each action. By understanding

the precipitating factors, these officials will be able to take affirmative action on potentially troublesome matters.

5. Inmate Liaison Committee

The I.L.C. consists of inmate representatives from all classifications of the inmate population, including the transient population. The I.L.C. meets regularly with the superintendent and his executive staff both formally and on an as-needed basis to discuss issues and changes that affect the entire population. A major complaint of the transient inmates prior to the January 1983 disturbance was their lack of representation in the Inmate Liaison Committee.

6. Law Library Services

Law library services are available to all inmates seven (7) days per week. Call-outs are scheduled within twenty-four (24) hours after request. The library is staffed by nineteen (19) law library clerks and is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily, and has a seating capacity of 120. There are plans to open the library in the evening in 1984 which will increase its availability by three (3) hours per day.

According to the Inmate Program Coordinator, over 2,500 inmates are served per month. He added that the library is also a repository for all other State facilities for reference purposes. Continuing legal education programs are conducted by inmate law clerks and outside law firms and legal counselors. Administration officials reported that preparations are underway to establish a legal reference area for use by the facility's staff.

Notary Public services are available in the law library on Wednesday and Friday of each week. The lack of availability of legal reference material and notary services had been a major complaint prior to the disturbance in January 1983. There were no complaints voiced by inmates relative to any aspects of law library services during this visit.

7. Religious Services

The various denominations conduct both services and religious instructions on a scheduled basis. No complaints were received from inmates regarding the scheduling and availability of religious services.

8. Visiting and Packages

Visiting hours are from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm. Weekday visits are unlimited and weekends are limited to one weekend day or holiday per week. A review of facility logs and discussions with staff and inmates revealed the two visiting rooms to be large enough to accommodate present needs.

The second visiting room has been opened and transient inmates are now permitted the same visiting privileges as general confinement inmates.

The receiving of packages is governed by Departmental Directive #4911. Rules and regulations, approved items, limits, etc. are applicable to all inmates. There is a package processing area available for each visiting room.

Transient inmates are now granted the same privileges as the general population in receiving packages both from visitors and through the mail. This was not allowed prior to January, 1983. Commission staff received no complaints.

9. Commissary

All inmates have the opportunity to make two (2) commissary buys each month on a scheduled basis. Scheduled "Buy Dates" are posted in each housing unit. No complaints were elicited from the inmate population regarding the prices on items available.

10. Phone Home Program

Schedules for the Phone Home Program are posted in each housing area. Phones are available in each housing area for inmate use in the program. No complaints were received regarding the availability or scheduling of the phone home program.

11. Showers

Scheduled bath house showers are available in the evening, three (3) times per week. There are also showers available in the housing blocks and yards that are utilized on a limited, as needed basis. All segments of the population are granted the same showering privileges. No inmate complaints were received regarding shower availability.

12. Food Services

Since the time of the disturbance, new kitchens have been installed, the mess halls were refurbished and a new food service manager was hired. A twenty-eight (28) day rotating menu has also been put into effect. Commission staff sampled the food and it appeared to be sufficient in both quality and quantity. No complaints were received from inmates regarding food services.

G. DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

As a result of a federal court action, a new disciplinary system has been developed and implemented by the Department of Correctional Services. This system is called the III Tier System.

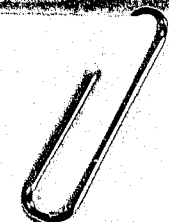
Since the disciplinary system is relatively new, it was difficult to assess its effectiveness. However, information obtained revealed the following statistical data:

	June 1983	July	August	September	October	November 1983
Tier III	51	61	80	89	67	49
Tier II	Unavailable	395	444	408	321	384
Tier I	Unavailable	290	168	330	366	118
TOTALS	745	746	692	827	754	551

Although the above data may not be sufficient to evidence any important changes this data should be utilized on a continuous basis to serve as an early warning system in determining a variety of problems which may exist in the facility.

RECOMMENDATION

The administration should continue to gather and closely monitor statistical information concerning its disciplinary process. Such data should be considered when developing and implementing the facility's security and program policies and procedures.



H. PHYSICAL PLANT

A number of major renovation projects have been started and/or completed within the past year:

1. The mess hall and kitchen areas have been renovated and opened and the windows in Housing Block-B are presently being replaced. The old window cranks from Housing Block-B will be reinstalled in Housing Block-A to replace those that are inoperable.
2. Both Housing Blocks A and B are being freshly painted by inmate work gangs.
3. The Special Housing Unit cells now contain security light fixtures and bunks permanently affixed to the cell walls.
4. The previous "house gangs" (housing block work gangs) have been replaced by inmate porters. This change appears to have contributed to a cleaner appearance in the housing areas.
5. A number of security gates have been installed in corridors and housing units to improve security and control of inmate movement.
6. The new gymnasiums for Housing Blocks A and B have been opened for use by inmates.
7. Previously, numerous complaints have been received by inmates in Tappan regarding the serving of cold food. To correct this situation, the facility is now in the process of installing heated food compartments and serving counters. In addition, new equipment is being installed for properly sanitizing kitchen utensils subsequent to use.

**END**