

February 2, 2024,

Commissioner Randall Liberty, Deputy Commissioner Anthony Cantillo, Associate Commissioner Christine Thibeault, Superintendent Lynne Allen, *Deputy Superintendent Ryan Anderson*, *Facility Manager Aaron Beaulieu*, Director of Security Sean O'Keefe, DOC Human Resources Director Aimee Norko:

The Maine Department of Corrections' mission statement reads: "Making our communities safer by reducing harm through supportive intervention, empowering change, and restoring lives." Achieving this mission is difficult to meet under the current conditions at Long Creek Youth Development Center (LCYDC).

We are writing to you because we have serious safety concerns about current conditions at LCYDC. Our knowledgeable and experienced security staff, educators, and support staff are not receiving the support needed each day. The inner perimeter within LCYDC currently lacks a safe and secure organizational structure. This includes poor staff scheduling, limited staff availability, inability for residents to engage in programming, and lack of engagement for productive discussion from the Commissioner's office and facility administrators. This contributes to dire safety and security concerns among staff interacting with our high-risk adolescent juvenile population.

In the past months, lack of staffing has led to riots in the facility. Sadly, residents who want to be successful and desire access to LCYDC's educational programming, resources, and staff are harmed and threatened by these incidents.

Over the past four years, the chronic staffing and scheduling issues, declining recruitment and retention of staff, unsafe working conditions, and unsustainable work schedule expectations have persistently placed our resident children and staff in harm's way, and we believe this is entirely avoidable. We have raised these concerns, outlined several remedies, and have pleaded for help from the facility's administration and the Department of Corrections on numerous occasions, yet we have seen no measurable response.

The consequences of not having proper staffing levels have resulted in:

- Increased facility lockdowns
 - Increased resident trauma, isolation, acting-out behaviors, and heightened need for mental health supports
 - Increased mental health crises, which result in increased calls for suicide watches
 - Inability to consistently comply with suicide watch policies
- Increased incidents
- Increased staff injuries

Month	Fights	Resident Assault	Residents Assault on Staff	Use of Force (Physical)	Use of Force (Mechanical)	Significant Incident (More than 3 Residents)
July	7	8	-	3	-	-
August	6	9	6	5	5	-
September	6	3	3	11	1	2
October	5	12	6	11	3	3
November	3	1	3	4	3	2
December	-	4	5	7	5	4

- Increased costs from damages to facility property
- Destruction of multiple housing units
- Inability to consistently comply with Prison Rape Elimination Act staffing standards
- Prevention of children's access to classroom education and prevention of staff's ability to deliver education to the student residents
 - Inability to carry out residents' Individual Education Plans (IEPs)
- Shutting down programs that support residents' medical, clinical, and therapeutic treatment
- Ceasing operations for skill building and extracurricular activities that support residents' rehabilitation
- Failure to open/maintain non-secure community housing (ACER House)
- Inability to follow best practices, as we are housing committed residents with detained residents
- Unsustainable (and massive amount of) forced overtime
 - This contributes to significant safety issues and staff turnover rates

In August of 2023, Deputy Commissioner Anthony Cantillo came to speak with workers after some of our staff wrote a letter outlining our safety concerns; since then, we have received zero communication regarding suggestions or ideas to resolve these ongoing challenges. It is egregious to ignore these problems, as we have repeatedly called for additional resources and Department support.

When the Department of Corrections allow these issues to go on without adequate response, you are allowing for more problems to develop for the disadvantaged youth and your staff, who work in constant crisis. These experiences increase staff burnout and turnover, further inhibiting our ability to serve the state of Maine. We need support, the youth need attention, and we need real changes. While the state legislature works to decide the future of Long Creek, the state cannot continuously neglect the needs of the youth currently in our care. Without immediate action, their social and emotional development will continue to suffer.

As staff at LCYDC, we are presenting the following recommendations to cease the attrition of personnel and establish consistent and responsive staff shift schedules, supporting interactive facility teamwork and an organizational structure that ensures a safe and secure facility for resident youth and staff. We ask that you work with us to correct this immediately by:

- Addressing staffing levels, schedule rotation, and unit assignment
 - One Juvenile Program Worker (JPW) per eight residents per shift to comply with PREA requirements
 - Two JPWs in each housing unit per shift
 - Inside LCYDC, ACER, and Unity Houses
 - One JPW Control Officer position per shift
 - Two JPWs for the Recreation position post restored per shift
 - Four JPWs to be able to respond at all hours per shift
 - JPW Rover position post restored
 - JPW Intake position post restored
 - JPW Lobby position post restored
 - Three Juvenile Program Specialists (JPS) per shift
- Six total Juvenile Facility Operations Supervisors (JFOS) per shift
 - A 7th full-time JFOS Scheduling Captain position per shift
- Providing and negotiating a recruitment and retention stipend for all staff at LCYDC until staffing is level
- Opening a productive discussion with security staff to develop stable shift schedules

- Making sure that new hires must not be forced to work 12-hour shifts until they have completed one year of employment
- Providing an incentive structure for security trained LCYDC staff to fill vacancies and unfilled shifts
- Restoring voluntary overtime stipend agreement and expanding to mandatory overtime shifts
 - Overtime stipends paid to workers who go beyond 8-hour shifts
- Deploying other security trained DOC staff to temporarily fill vacancies until safe staffing levels are achieved
- Restoring regular town hall meetings with work *directives* clearly articulated to all staff
 - Interactive organizational teambuilding, staff accessibility, and communication
- Providing monthly vacancy reports for LCYDC staff
 - Current vacancies include but are not limited to:
 - Office Specialist 1, 12/15/23 vacancy
 - Teacher (ELA) 10/23 vacancy (approx.)
 - Additionally, the facility has cut the following positions that it used to operate with:
 - Assistant Principal position
 - Special Education Director position
 - Librarian position
 - 1.5 more Special Education Teachers Approx. 77 JPW positions (previously available to LCYDC just prior to COVID)
- Restoring Building Control Supervisor position
- Ensuring ongoing communication of action plans to resolve staffing and safety concerns at the MSEA Labor Management meetings
- Ensuring that duty officers not be called in for normal staff operations, as the Department needs to have duty officers on call for emergency purposes

We are in crisis at Long Creek. It is imperative that the Commissioner's office and the facility administration provide immediate attention to these matters to ensure our ability to carry out our duties in accordance with state and federal laws, to meet ACA and PBS accredited correctional standards, and to best serve the state of Maine's public. Furthermore, without access to this basic support, the likelihood of recidivism for these adolescents increases dramatically.

We are formally requesting a detailed response to this letter and our recommendations within 10 workdays. Email your response to the staff of LCYDC as well as MSEA-SEIU Local 1989 at representation@mseaseiu.org. We look forward to working together with you to fulfill this administration's commitment to the Maine Model of Corrections.

Respectfully,

On behalf of the Staff at Long Creek Youth Development Center