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Auditor General DePasquale Says Department of Corrections Properly Recording Inmate Violence, Must Do More to Reduce Incidents

Encourages review of correctional officer staffing, training, other violence-prevention needs

HARRISBURG – Auditor General Eugene DePasquale said today that a recent audit of the Department of Corrections (DOC) shows that while the agency is properly recording reported inmate violence, with more than 4,000 incidents recorded in a 15-month period, the agency must assess staffing and other resources to prevent assaults and fights.

During the audit period of January 2015 to March 2016, DOC reported a total of 4,198 assaults and fights in the SCI system, an average of 65 assaults on staff and 136 inmate fights per month.

“Knowing a prison has a violence problem is one thing, but taking appropriate actions and having enough well-trained staff to prevent the violence in the first place is key,” DePasquale said. “While it is encouraging that the Department of Corrections is keeping good records on violent incidents, they must continually review and improve policies, programs and procedures to prevent inmate violence to protect correctional officers, other DOC staff and the general public.”

DePasquale said DOC is to be commended for its relatively new Swift, Certain and Fair pilot progressive discipline program that it launched at SCI Somerset and several other facilities to respond to inmate misconduct.

“Such innovative programs as Swift, Certain and Fair are commendable, but I encourage the Department of Corrections to continuously monitor its violence prevention policies, programs and procedures, and make adjustments as necessary,” DePasquale said. “I also urge DOC officials to assess if it has the appropriate correctional officer staff and training.

“As we have observed as recently as last year at SCI Houtzdale, where five correctional officers were injured, inmate violence can quickly escalate,” he said. “We must use every tool possible to prevent such violent outbreaks to maintain a safe environment in our correctional institutions. Having thousands of violent incidents in a prison system of 48,000 inmates does not to me translate into a safe prison environment.”

The audit, which was requested by the Department of Corrections, tested violence reporting procedures in seven of 26 state correctional institutions (SCIs):

- Forest, Forest County;

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Audit of Violence Misconduct Reporting

26 STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

+ tracking 4,198 violent incidents between Jan. 2015 & March 2016

65

STAFF ASSAULTS

per month

INMATE FIGHTS

136

SOURCE: www.paauditor.gov

- Greene, Greene County;
- Houtzdale, Clearfield County;
- Muncy, Lycoming County;
- Retreat, Luzerne County;
- Rockview, Centre County; and
- Somerset, Somerset County.

DePasquale said while DOC appears to follow proper procedures to record incidents of violence, the reporting system has flaws that prevented auditors from determining whether all incidents were actually reported.

“The violent incidents on the books were properly recorded, but what we don’t know is if there are incidents that did not make it into the books,” DePasquale said.

The audit, which had one finding and eight recommendations, found four violence monitoring administrative areas that should be improved:

- **Assault and fight reports:** Auditors found differences between the number of assaults and fights entered into the DOC’s misconduct tracking system and the number of assaults and fights recorded in the DOC’s monthly reports provided to executive staff for evaluation. There were 19 more assaults and fights entered into the system than the 1,404 reported during the 15-month audit period for the seven SCIs tested.
- **Tracking misconduct forms:** DOC does not account for and track all paper misconduct forms, and auditors found gaps in sequential numbering of forms. Accountability over sequential numbering is key to ensuring that forms recorded in the tracking system are completed by staff and are not intentionally or unintentionally discarded prior to entering into the tracking system.
- **Procedures for misconducts “dismissed without prejudice”:** DOC does not have a procedure to ensure that violent misconducts that are dismissed without prejudice by a hearing examiner are refiled, or require that the employee document the reason the misconduct was not refiled and have the explanation approved by management. Such information is important to ensure that inmates do not believe that violence can be committed without consequences, putting inmates and staff at risk for injury, and that all violent misconducts are recorded.
- **Contingency planning:** DOC lacks supervisory oversight and contingency planning over misconduct analysis and reporting. The department has one analyst assigned to review misconduct reporting, without technical supervisory oversight and without any backup.

The 40-page Department of Corrections Violent Misconduct Reporting audit report, which covered Jan. 1, 2015, to March 31, 2016, is available online at: www.PaAuditor.gov.

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EDITOR’S NOTE: Attached is a table from page 11 in the audit report showing a breakdown of violent incidents at each facility during the 15-month audit period. According to DOC, a fight is an incident in which two or more individuals participate actively in the altercation. An assault is an incident in which one individual acts in a violent or aggressive manner and the other does not retaliate in any way.

Number of Assaults and Fights

January 1, 2015 through March 31, 2016

Institution	Inmate Pop. as of 3/31/16	Aggravated Assaults	Staff Assaults	Attempted Assaults on Staff	Inmate Assaults	Attempted Inmate Assaults	Inmate Fights	Total
Albion	2,232	2	43	5	36	2	70	158
Benner	2,105	0	65	7	25	0	89	186
Cambridge Springs	1,195	0	10	0	28	0	64	102
Camp Hill	3,482	3	62	29	47	4	116	261
Chester	1,264	0	10	2	33	0	80	125
Coal Twp	2,319	0	56	7	35	2	92	192
Dallas	2,138	1	33	7	35	2	68	146
Fayette	2,060	2	32	6	37	1	92	170
Forest	2,310	1	84	12	62	1	97	257
Frackville	1,189	0	31	17	15	3	70	136
Graterford	3,241	0	44	10	35	4	91	184
Greene	1,727	3	34	15	21	3	69	145
Houtzdale	2,521	1	67	1	54	0	114	237
Huntingdon	2,147	4	33	9	77	3	125	251
Laurel Highlands	1,605	0	15	1	14	0	34	64
Mahanoy	2,406	1	46	13	50	5	110	225
Mercer	1,444	0	2	0	10	0	34	46
Muncy	1,386	1	81	26	81	4	90	283
Pine Grove	860	0	30	2	25	2	119	178
Pittsburgh	1,831	0	30	7	27	0	27	91
Quehanna	450	0	0	0	2	0	4	6
Retreat	1,110	0	27	3	28	1	65	124
Rockview	2,391	0	58	5	39	0	75	177
Smithfield	1,308	1	46	13	27	1	97	185
Somerset	2,384	3	22	0	41	0	115	181
Waymart	1,392	0	18	9	25	2	34	88
TOTAL	48,497	23	979	206	909	40	2,041	4,198

Source: Developed by Department of the Auditor General staff from the DOC Misconduct Tracking System (or the WebTAS system, as applicable). As noted in the methodology section of this report, we determined the data to be sufficiently reliable with one limitation, i.e., we are not assured that the data included a complete population of incidents that occurred. However, we found the data to accurately represent the incidents that were recorded.

From Page 11 in DOC Violent Misconduct Reporting audit (October 2016)