

June 17, 2019

Secretary Dawn B. Crim
Department of Safety and Professional Services
4822 Madison Yards Way
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Secretary Crim,

Who is in charge of oversight of the Wisconsin prison facilities operated by the Department of Corrections? In the two years that I have been incarcerated, at both Dodge Correctional Institution (DCI) and, presently, Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution (KMCI), I have borne witness to several deficiencies and inadequacies of the current system; particularly, in the arena of health and safety. Many current building conditions leave much to be desired. I have written to those I thought responsible for correcting these some of these shortcomings only to have my concerns referred back to the very institution they were, originally, directed towards. These matters were then mostly ignored and/or dismissed. (I am happy to provide copies of this correspondence, along with the responses, at your request.) Is their not an independent body responsible for the oversight of negligence within facility grounds? Are the facilities to be trusted to police themselves? Needless to say, most conditions remain the status quo.

Prior to my imprisonment, I had worked for a contractor whose primary field was the remodeling of nursing homes. Therefore, I feel that I am at least semi-informed and educated as to the standard building codes and regulations regarding commercial properties. Due to the age of the buildings (KMCI was built in 1963), I understand that many of the construction conditions here may fall under the "grandfather" clause; yet, I am also aware that when repairs or alterations are performed the conditions must be brought up to current standards. Code infractions I have noticed include broken electrical sockets, bare/uncovered fluorescent light bulbs in the individual cells, secondary/external water pumps attached to the antiquated boiler/heating system that require being plugged into an ordinary electrical outlet in order for heat to be distributed to distant cells (these were installed last winter after the heat failed in unit #5 for several days during a violent cold streak), a lack of adequate insulation in exterior walls, and non-compliance with many ADA standards throughout much of the facility. Occupancy levels seem questionable, as well (e.g., people sleeping on the floor in "boats" in common areas and number of operational toilets).

Between the winter of 2018 and 2019, for roughly a year, acoustic ceiling tiles had been removed from a hallway in housing unit #5 in order to repair a water leak, thereby, exposing what appeared to be asbestos pipe insulation (frequently used as a fire retardant at the time of construction). After repeated complaints, the ceiling was, finally, replaced. No abatement or remediation was ever performed. Many here, also, question the peeling paint and poor water quality as a possibly being contaminated with lead. The septic system is not immune to its share of problems; the urinals are frequently clogged (to overflowing) and the bathroom (on Unit #5) often smells of "sewer" gas. It seems as if the outdated infrastructure of KMCI is in need of serious attention, yet administration appears apathetic to these sad conditions.

Health and sanitation are another anathema plaguing these outdated facilities. Inmate cleaning crews and maintenance workers seem neither properly trained nor equipped for their daily tasks. Mold and mildew are present in the bathroom/showers – and, elsewhere, I’m sure – and when I asked that bleach be used to clean these areas I was told that “tile cleaner” is what was needed. That was never provided and the mold continues to flourish. Of particular concern ought to be those with breathing problems and who must use a CPAP machine. These individuals are resigned to cleaning their CPAP machine with luke-warm water, in a sink that someone has just shaved their head in (in a moldy bathroom). In the individual cells, as a security precaution, the covers on the heating registers are permanently screwed shut and, therefore, are unable to be cleaned out; ridding them of Band-Aids, Q-Tips, toenail clippings, and the other miscellaneous, bio-hazardous substances and bodily fluids too disturbing to imagine is not possible. The inmate’s source of hot water on the housing units is a utility sink shared with the cleaning crew for mixing chemicals. Most recently, I have been told by a kitchen worker that the dish soap has been out-of-stock and the main kitchen was using laundry detergent to clean the pots, pans and dishes, as well as food prep surfaces! When clean rags are not available workers are told to use their aprons. Sanitizer is considered a precious commodity and rarely made available.

The Wisconsin prison system has nearly 24,000 people in their charge and it is shocking in which the conditions that they are kept. Maintaining such a system is a costly undertaking (over \$1.2 billion per year!), but if the state is unable to provide a safe and clean environment, perhaps alternatives need to be investigated. Perhaps, now is the time to act *proactively* and insist on an unbiased and independent review of the facilities operated by the state in an effort to combat and correct these deplorable conditions.

Regardless of an offender’s status in the eyes of the state, they still ought to be afforded the same health and safety standards as the rest of society. The fact remains that while incarcerated we are still under state care and unable to rectify any of these aforementioned issues by our own accord. Recalling the old adage, “The inmates are running the asylum”; in Wisconsin, they may be better off doing so. It’s time for the DOC to clean up their act!

Thank you for your time and attention to these matters.

Respectfully,

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cc: Nia Trammell, Deputy Secretary DSPS