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New Jersey Department of Corrections Response to Office of Corrections Ombudsperson New Jersey State Prison Inspection Report

September 3, 2025

The New Jersey Department of Corrections ("NJDOC") is in receipt of the document entitled "Inspection Report New Jersey State Prison, West Compound, General Population" dated September 2025 issued by the Office of the Corrections Ombudsman ("OCO"). The NJDOC appreciates the review by the OCO and takes the Discussion and Recommendations under advisement. The NJDOC offers the following with respect to the recommendations:

- Recommendation: Lawmakers and the Department of Corrections should prioritize and fund the demolition and replacement of the West Compound with modern correctional housing units that better meet the needs of the Department and the incarcerated population.

Response: The Department is thankful for and acknowledges the support of the State and lawmakers regarding infrastructure maintenance and improvements within the NJDOC during the current administration. With necessary financial assistance, the State has supported a multitude of important and necessary infrastructure improvement projects throughout the NJDOC facilities, including the construction of a new female facility. With regard to the recommendation by the OCO to fund a demolition and replacement of the West Compound at New Jersey State Prison, the NJDOC remains committed to new construction and replacement of aging units, while recognizing budget constraints, potential historical significance, and that the expense of demolition and rebuilding on the same site may be unnecessary. In all, the NJDOC shall remain committed to continuing to maintain and enhance infrastructure within the NJDOC facilities.

- Recommendation: Lawmakers should adopt standards for humane prison conditions, including standards for the size of single- and double-occupancy cells.

Response: The NJDOC would welcome working with lawmakers if there is an interest in establishing statutory standards, as the Department will want to ensure that lawmakers are aware of current infrastructure, potential needs for enhancements and/or new build to meet any new standards, and budgeting considerations.

- Recommendation: The Department should explore options for creating more shower privacy in the West Compound housing units, obscuring views into the first floor showers from the second and third floors. Standard size bath towels should also be provided to the population free of charge.

Response: The showers in NJSP have been repeatedly audited and passed inspection by independent auditors regarding the federal Prison Rape Elimination Act standards for privacy. There are partitions for privacy as well as a large shower curtain in the open position as shown in the OCO photograph.

- Recommendation: The Department should consider moving people out of the West Compound who can safely be housed in other settings. Some of the population's resistance to transferring appears to be based in having a single-occupancy room and not wanting to be placed elsewhere with a cellmate. The Department should explore options for creating more single-occupancy cells for individuals who have already spent many years with their own room, and who don't present a suicide risk.

Response: Through the classification and operations systems, NJDOC continuously engages in evaluating the needs of the population, their classification status and safety/security risks, and bed space availability thereby placing individuals in appropriate security-level housing based on their classification status. The Department appreciates that the OCO recommends additional single cell housing, however, as noted by mental health professionals, single-cell housing is not always preferred in a correctional setting for mental health reasons. Moreover, given the age and infrastructure of many of the facilities, the Department is extremely limited in "creating" more single-occupancy cells based on the facilities' design, age and the number of incarcerated persons that require housing. That said, for new construction, the Department is able to work with design consultants regarding the development of additional single occupancy areas.

- Recommendation: The Department should build the capacity to calculate and track out-of-cell time for individuals housed in the General Population. This is particularly useful information for tracking impacts on quality of life both when movement is restricted due to periods of short-staffing and when movement is increased due to expansion of programming, recreation, and jobs.

Response: Incarcerated persons in General Population have access to various voluntary out of cell opportunities throughout the day including, but not limited to employment, programs, education, religious services, congregate interaction, visits, and recreation. Movement documentation and logbooks provide the out of cell time for General Population.