



Inspection Report

Garden State Youth Correctional Facility, General Population

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Executive Summary

Garden State Youth Correctional Facility (GSYCF) houses young adults generally in their early 20s, most of whom are serving short sentences and returning to the community within a few years.¹ The Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson inspected the facility in July of 2024, with a series of follow-up visits conducted throughout the remainder of the year. For this inspection, the Office focused on the facility's General Population, observing conditions in living spaces, day spaces, and kitchens, monitoring compliance with state administrative code and policies, and analyzing data on daily activities and behavioral issues. This report details the components of the Office's inspection, provides context and justification for how the inspection was scored, and includes observations, data analysis, and a few photographs and diagrams.

The Office found common spaces, cells, and kitchens in need of extensive repair and deep cleaning. The physical conditions and drainage in the kitchens where food is prepared were particularly concerning. After observing crowding in cells while conducting interviews on the first day of the inspection, the Office amended its inspection tool to include measurements of cell size and an accounting of capacity and occupancy.

Originally designed for single occupancy, the units that house most of the General Population (called the "outside houses") are quite small and have been double-bunked for several decades, likely contributing to the physical erosion of the building and a reduced capacity to engage the full population in programming, school, and work opportunities. Crowding and inactivity in the outside houses may also contribute to tensions between incarcerated people. Each of these outcomes is discussed in the body of this report. Notably, corrections practitioners and mental health providers have found that double-bunking serves a valuable role in preventing self-harm and suicide.

The facility's Administration was very responsive to the Office's initial findings and took decisive and immediate steps to remedy several areas of concern. For example, the facility immediately addressed expired fire extinguishers throughout the facility, replaced missing pillows for nearly the entire prison population, and purchased secure storage units for personal property in all general population cells.

By the end of March 2025, they had installed new shower hardware and lighting fixtures, ordered new cleaning products to remove rust stains, developed plans for a new work detail to deep-clean shower stalls on a weekly basis using professional grade tools, and sought bids for remodeling and professional cleaning of showers. The kitchen has been thoroughly cleaned and organized, floors have been repaired with temporary patches pending a larger capital construction project, kitchen staff members are being trained in SERV Safe, meals are now served in clamshell food containers with juice cartons, and the population is given opportunities to eat at tables in the day rooms rather than on their beds. We were encouraged to learn that the Department of Corrections (the Department) recently received capital funds to replace roofing and floors at the facility—funding they have requested for several decades.

The Ombudsperson Office recommends that the Department develop a strategic plan to assess and limit double-bunking in small cells, set performance goals and incentives to increase engagement in work and programs, take a regular cell-to-cell inventory of maintenance needs and missing essential items, routinely audit food services, and reduce the cost of initial commissary packages. These recommendations are proposed in more detail at the end of this report.

Facility and Population

The Ombudsperson Office conducted an announced inspection of the General Population housing units and kitchens at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility across four days in July 2024 (July 10, 11, 17, and 18). The Office made follow-up visits to observe improvements, repairs, and corrective measures on August 15, October 16, and December 19, 2024, and March 31, 2025. At the time of the July inspection, nearly 1,000 people were housed at the facility, 636 of whom were in General Population housing.ⁱⁱ Three-quarters of the prison cells designated for General Population were double-bunked.

The facility is populated with young people who will return to the community relatively soon. As of January 31, 2025, 50% of the people housed at Garden State were between the ages of 22 and 25. Three-quarters of the population had a minimum prison term of five years or less, generally sentenced for person and weapons offenses. As of July 2024, the average person held at Garden State would reach their maximum sentence expiration in just over three years. Eighty-five percent of the population was Black or Hispanic, and 39% were categorized as vulnerable.ⁱⁱⁱ

Inspection Overview

The inspection involved observations, record reviews, interviews with 242 incarcerated people, and conversations with staff members assigned to the areas toured.

Table 1. Number of incarcerated people interviewed, by housing unit, July 2024

Housing Unit	Occupancy	Number of people interviewed
Outside Housing Units		
East 1	110	37
East 2	112	39
South 1	106	44
South 2	83	30
West 1	54	23
R-House / General Population Overflow Unit		
R-2-Left	51	20
R-2-Right	56	27
R-1-Right	37	9
PRU 4: GP overflow	27	13
Total	636	242

The Ombudsperson Office scored the facility according to an objective inspection instrument developed by the Office, based on applicable laws, regulations, policies, and best practices. Following an initial debrief conversation and multiple follow-up communications with the facility's Administration, as well as re-inspections of standards initially marked deficient, the Office assessed the facility for a revised score. The facility's score upon initial inspection was 72.9% and its score upon re-inspection is 85%. This score reflects compliance with practice standards related to sanitation, fire safety, food preparation, and personal living conditions. It also reflects admirable effort by the facility's Administration to take quick and ongoing corrective action to address identified deficiencies. The most notable initial point deductions related to:

- Cell size for those in double-occupancy rooms,
- Pillows and personal storage containers,
- Cleanliness of showers,
- Expired fire extinguishers,
- Access to paper forms on the housing units,
- Documenting food temperatures and inspections of food preparation areas, and
- Providing extra fluids to mitigate indoor temperatures at or above 86°F.

The scored inspection tool is published as an addendum to this narrative report.

Sanitation and Maintenance

The Ombudsperson Office's observations about maintenance and infrastructure needs confirm what the Department of Corrections itself has highlighted for the state's Commission on Capital Budgeting and Planning. Since at least 2008, the Department has requested funding to replace flooring, windows, and roofing for the structural integrity and habitability of Garden State Youth Correctional Facility.^{iv} These needs have taken on more urgency in recent years as the facility has absorbed populations transferred following the closures of other state correctional facilities for young adults and the relocation of the Department's central reception facility.

Despite daily cleaning schedules, pest control contracts, and routine maintenance, the Office observed individual cells, showers, and shared spaces in need of extensive repair and deep cleaning. Cell walls and ceilings were peeling and appeared moist and discolored. Windows were layered with dust and needed washing inside and out. Observations and interviews suggested that about one in every seven cells had toilets that ran constantly, leaked around the bottom, or flooded. In several cells, people had wrapped a sheet or blanket around the base of the toilet to prevent water leaking onto their personal belongings.



Window inside a GSCF prison cell. Photograph taken by Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson, July 17, 2024.

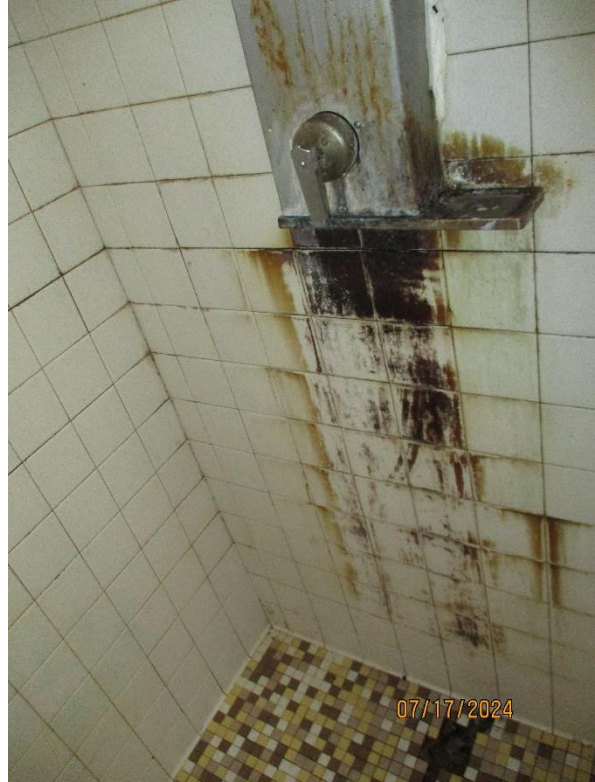
The floors, walls, and ceilings in shared spaces appeared to require scraping and resurfacing. The Department took the water fountains out of service several years ago and showers appeared to have rust, stains, and caked-on grime that may require cleaning with more powerful tools and supplies than were offered to the incarcerated population at the time of the inspection. Several showers had broken and missing tiles. Some had holes, including one that allowed a view into an adjacent shower (which was addressed after the inspection), or required other maintenance to address water pressure, water temperature, and light.

Housing Units

Inspection standards measure the population's access to telephones, showers, kiosks, and paper remedy forms. The Garden State facility met all of these standards except those relating to paper forms (sick call forms, property claims, requests for social services, law library, etc.), which the facility's Administration promptly addressed.

The Department provided documentation of pest control efforts showing exterminators making very regular site visits. Staff and the incarcerated population, however, still reported sightings and encounters with rodents and insects, particularly in the East, West, and South outside housing units.

The Department also provided the Ombudsperson Office with the facility's fire emergency policies and evacuation plans, and their most recent fire inspection report. The facility's Fire Safety Officer conducts a monthly internal inspection, and external inspections are carried out by a vendor. Each of the nine housing units inspected had multi-purpose dry chemical and water extinguishers. A change in vendors had delayed the external inspection process, however, and 15 of the 19 fire extinguishers observed had tags indicating they had expired the month prior—a problem that has since been remedied.



Shower in a GSCF General Population housing unit. Photograph by Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson, July 17, 2024.



Shower floor in a GSCF General Population housing unit. Photograph by Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson, July 17, 2024.

Linens and Furnishings in Cells

Cell-to-cell observations on the nine housing units revealed that each person had a mattress. Some were two inches thick, and others were three inches thick and newer. More than 70% of the incarcerated people interviewed had no pillow, a problem that Administration addressed with a full inventory and purchase of 1,200 pillows. They now maintain a surplus of pillows. Based on cell-to-cell interviews, 26% reported they were missing an essential item like a standard size towel, sheet, blanket, or change of clothes.

**MORE THAN 70% OF PEOPLE
INTERVIEWED HAD NO PILLOW.**

Department of Corrections policy requires each incarcerated person to be provided with a secure container that may be used to store clothing.^v Although people housed at Garden State had open shelving on the wall, the population was not uniformly provided with secured storage, though some had purchased

bins from the commissary. The facility Administration again took quick responsive action to this finding, ordering containers that can be secured with a lock and stored under the bed, to be distributed free of charge to each incarcerated person. We believe this corrective action will reduce lost and stolen property, and also improve in-room food storage and pest control.

Mitigating Summer Heat

Facility Administrators are required by a standing directive to take certain steps to mitigate excessive heat when indoor temperatures reach or exceed 86°F.^{vi} These steps include, among other things, opening windows and making fans available to improve airflow, increasing access to showers, fluids, and ice, and extra precautions for incarcerated people with certain medical conditions.



During the Ombudsperson inspection, in-cell and other indoor temperatures measured between 79° and 90.1°F, with seven out of the nine inspected housing units registering temperatures of 86°F or warmer. Officers recorded the temperatures at least once per shift. The incarcerated population had opportunities to shower on both first and second shift. Windows were open, and large fans were used to increase ventilation, but the units still felt hot and stuffy. Officers were all aware of those individuals needing additional protective measures because of medical conditions. Small personal fans had been out of stock in the commissary, but were being replenished during the Ombudsperson visit. Ice delivery was irregular and not always quick enough to prevent the ice from melting before people received it.

Drinks were not served with lunch or dinner, and no additional liquids or bottles of water were provided at any time to supplement the tap water in individual cells. The incarcerated population, however, was authorized to purchase two cases of bottled water per canteen order during the summer months (a total of four cases per month in June, July, and August).

Kitchens and Food Service

Several standards related to food preparation and meal service were not met, and the Ombudsperson Office has concerns related to kitchen staffing, sanitation, and recording of food temperatures. The Department has recently recruited a statewide supervisor of food services who will be responsible for compliance oversight.

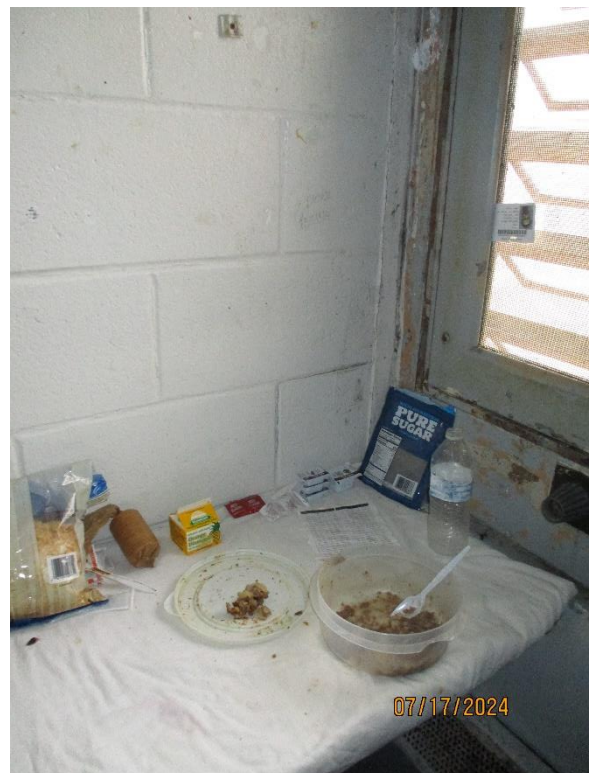
The kitchen where food is prepared for the incarcerated population has been in extraordinary disrepair for decades. The floor is eroded and pitted from standing water. A sink with no drainage pipes appeared to pour out onto a clogged grate which flooded the floor, mixing with food scraps and garbage. Similarly, the kitchen that serves the Officer's Dining Room had clogged drains and pools of water mixed with food scraps and trash on the floor. Large open drainage holes in the floor were also inadequately covered to prevent workers from accidentally stepping into them. Funding from the Fiscal Year 2025 Capital Commission is aimed at remedying these issues. An approved capital project for \$13 million is currently in project scope development.

Although the Department has been diligent in its staff recruitment efforts, the kitchen was notably understaffed both when it came to Department employees and workers assigned from the incarcerated population. During the initial inspection, temperatures of food prepared in the main kitchen were not recorded before being sent out to the housing units. This had been remedied upon re-inspection. The Office observed food carts that were delivered and left open outdoors, outside of the housing units, with inadequate temperature control. Cold food trays were also not refrigerated or kept on ice at serving stations.

Meal service did not include drinks with lunch or dinner, even when indoor temperatures were in the 80s and 90s. Beverage dispensers were filled, but not carried up to the housing unit where the Office was observing meal service. Rather than serving



GSYCF kitchen floor. Photograph by Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson, July 18, 2024.



People at GSYCF ate meals in their cells. Photograph by Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson, July 17, 2024.

food on trays that are cleaned in industrial dish washers, each incarcerated person was served in personal reusable plastic bowls that were purchased through the commissary and washed in the sinks in their rooms. Housing units did not have sufficient seating to accommodate the population eating meals at tables in common areas, and people instead filled their bowls and returned to their cells to eat. Notably, cells had no seating other than the bunk beds.

Cell Size and Crowding

At the time of the inspection, prison cells in the facility’s academic housing unit, the Vulnerable Population Unit, and other housing units in R-House were mostly single-celled and seemed reasonably sized for one person. Notably, these units were also more neat, clean, and organized. Those housed in the Pre-Reception Unit (PRU-4) for General Population overflow were in larger cells that appeared reasonably sized for double bunking. However, the “outside houses” (East, West, and South) were double-bunked and quite small for two people. Each cell in these housing units was just under 67 square feet, with only 18 square feet of unencumbered floor space per person. The floor space that is not taken up by the bunk bed, desk, or toilet is hardly large enough for an average size person to do push-ups or crunches (see diagrams on pp. 8-9). In the cells in these outside houses, there is no seat next to the desk, so people generally lie on their beds. The space between the bottom and top bunk is 29 inches, which prevents an average size person from sitting upright.

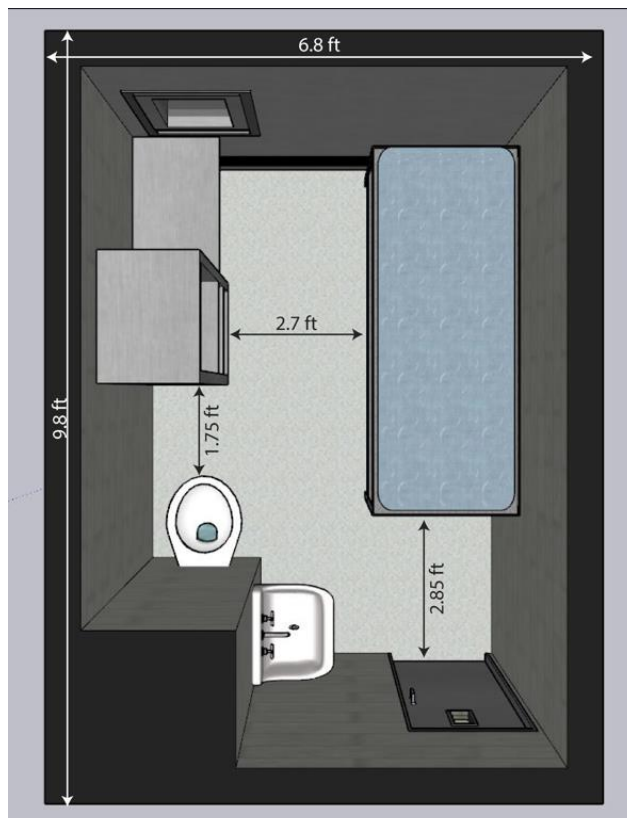


Diagram of cell in GSCF “outside houses.” Created by Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson.

The Department of Corrections currently has no standards in policy or administrative code related to cell size for state prisons. Comparable regulations for county facilities, which the Office used as an inspection standard, require 50 square feet of unencumbered floor space—25 for each occupant.^{vii}

Table 2. Outside housing unit design capacity and actual population, October 16, 2024

Housing unit	Design capacity (single cell)	Number of cells in use	People on the unit
South 1	66	48	94
South 2	66	46	87
East 1	66	54	108
East 2	66	61	119
West 1	66	42	80

Note: Some cells were offline or closed for repairs, and some cells were outfitted with bunkbeds but housed only one person.

Historical Reference Points for Cell Size, Crowding, and Capacity

Historical records show cells in the facility's outside houses were designed to be single- rather than double-occupancy. A 1981 assessment by Governor Brendan Byrne's task force on prison and jail overcrowding, reports the Youth Reception and Corrections Center at Yardville (renamed Garden State Youth Correctional Facility in 1987), was designed for single cells.^{viii} The report roughly estimates the square footage of these cells at 70 square feet each (though their actual measurements are 66.6 square feet). In its Eighth Amendment analysis, the report warns that while double-bunking these cells might meet constitutional standards if the two people only use the room for sleeping, the increased population would create resource scarcity, making it logistically difficult for the facility to engage the full population in out-of-cell activities. The report noted that the whole incarcerated population at the facility at that time was in their cells only during sleeping hours, was involved in activities during the day, and that an increase in the population "would place a severe strain on these resources."^{ix} In a legislative hearing the following year (1982), Department of Corrections Commissioner William Fauver warned that double-bunking cells intended for single-occupancy would likely lead to major disturbances.^x

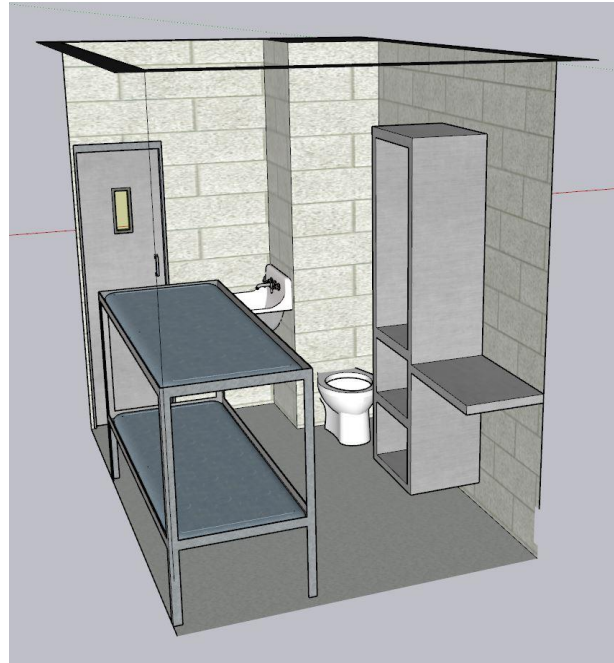


Diagram of cell in GSCF "outside houses." Created by Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson.

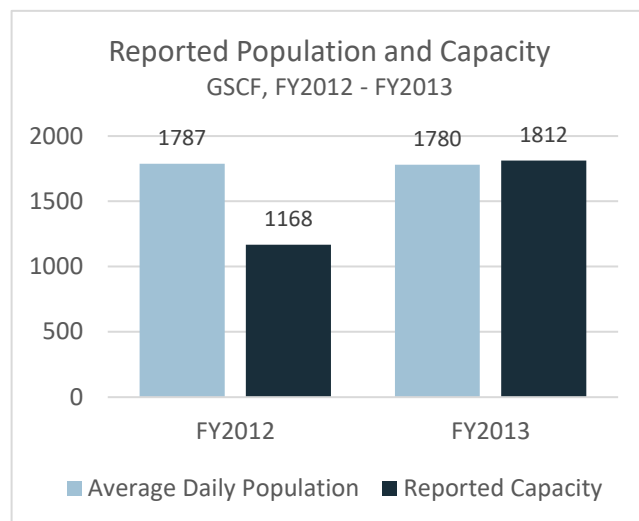
An initial strategic plan created for the Department of Corrections with the support of an expert policy council suggests a goal with regard to cell size, though it has not since materialized into a policy standard.^{xi} In 1976, legislation that made the New Jersey Department of Corrections independent from the state's Department of Institutions and Agencies required the new Department to develop a comprehensive master plan for the state's correctional system.^{xii} The following year, the state's Correctional Master Plan Policy Council issued its report and recommendations, proposing that by 1986, all existing facilities provide at least 50 square feet of cell space for each incarcerated person.^{xiii} The report categorized housing capacity as standard or sub-standard. Housing was categorized as sub-standard if "doubling-up of beds in standard bed spaces results in less than 50 sq.ft. per inmate."^{xiv} It used standard bed spaces for planning and capacity projections.

The first year that the average daily population surpassed this reported design capacity at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility was in 1984, reflecting a need for 40 additional standard beds.^{xv} By the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s, state budget records show Garden State Youth Correctional Facility housed roughly 1,700-1,800 people, 400-500 beds more than its operational capacity as calculated at the time.^{xvi}

The practice of double-bunking eventually gained research support as a means to prevent suicide in prisons, and a 2012 task force of administrators and clinicians recommended that most people in New Jersey state custody be housed with a cellmate.^{xvii}

State budget documents in Fiscal Year 2013 reflect a change in how capacity in the prisons was reported, switching from *design* capacity to *operational* capacity. This centered the capacity question on available beds and staff rather than on square footage.^{xviii} This change had the appearance of nearly doubling the reported capacity of Garden State Youth Correctional Facility even though no new or temporary buildings were added (see Figure 1). This shift to an operational capacity reporting measurement essentially eliminated the distinction previously made between standard and sub-standard beds and gave the appearance that the housing units were not overcrowded.

Figure 1. Change in GSCF capacity, 2012-2013



The Department of Corrections is not bound by the standards for cell size in county jails, nor by the proposals from New Jersey’s correctional leaders 50 years ago. They are delineated here to provide insight into how cell crowding and square footage per person might be objectively assessed today, and context for how utilizing cells to hold more people than they were initially designed for may have impacted the building’s infrastructure, living conditions, safety, and plumbing and electricity demands.

Purposeful Activity

The Ombudsperson Office reviewed education and programming data, work assignments, the facility’s schedule, and 14 days of handwritten logs tracking movement of the population and activities in the General Population housing units.^{xix} In mid-July, 173 out of 651 people in General Population (27%) were assigned a job other than tier sanitation,^{xx} 75 were engaged in vocational programs (career technical education), 120 were in therapeutic programming, 42 were attending high school, 28 were enrolled in college courses, 87 were enrolled in adult basic education, and 14 were engaged in music enrichment (see Figure 2).^{xxi} There is some overlap across these groups—109 individuals were engaged in multiple activities.

Work and programming are voluntary, and a portion of the incarcerated population chooses not to engage. There were also 122 people on waitlists for school and various programs (see Figure 2). These waitlists may suggest that interest in education and vocational programming may exceed the capacity of the facility to engage the population. At the time of this data snapshot, 39% of the General Population at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility (253 out of 651 people) were not actively participating in a job, school, or any programs (see Figure 3). The Department reports that as of February 2025, this non-active portion of the population had decreased to 35%.

Figure 2. School and program enrollment among those in General Population

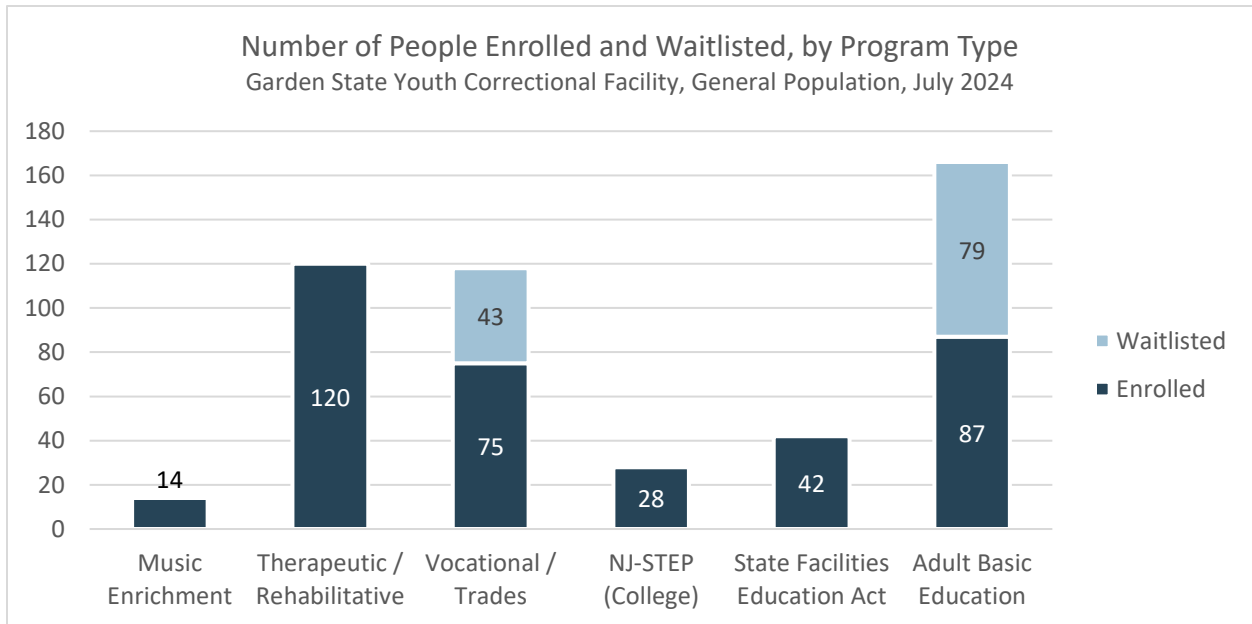
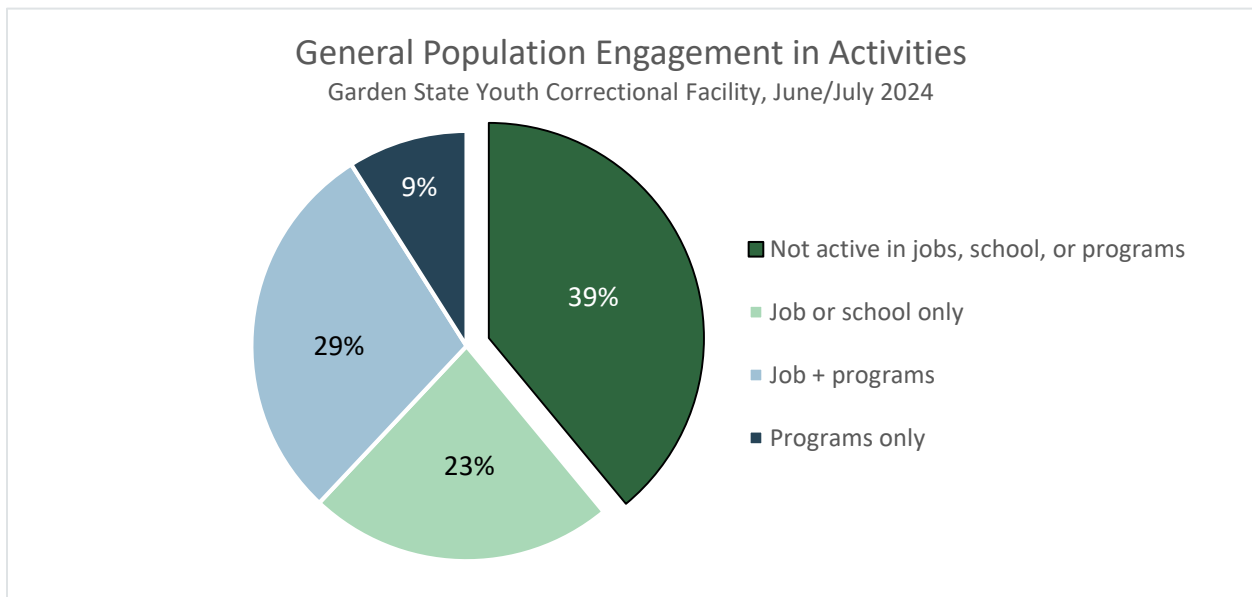


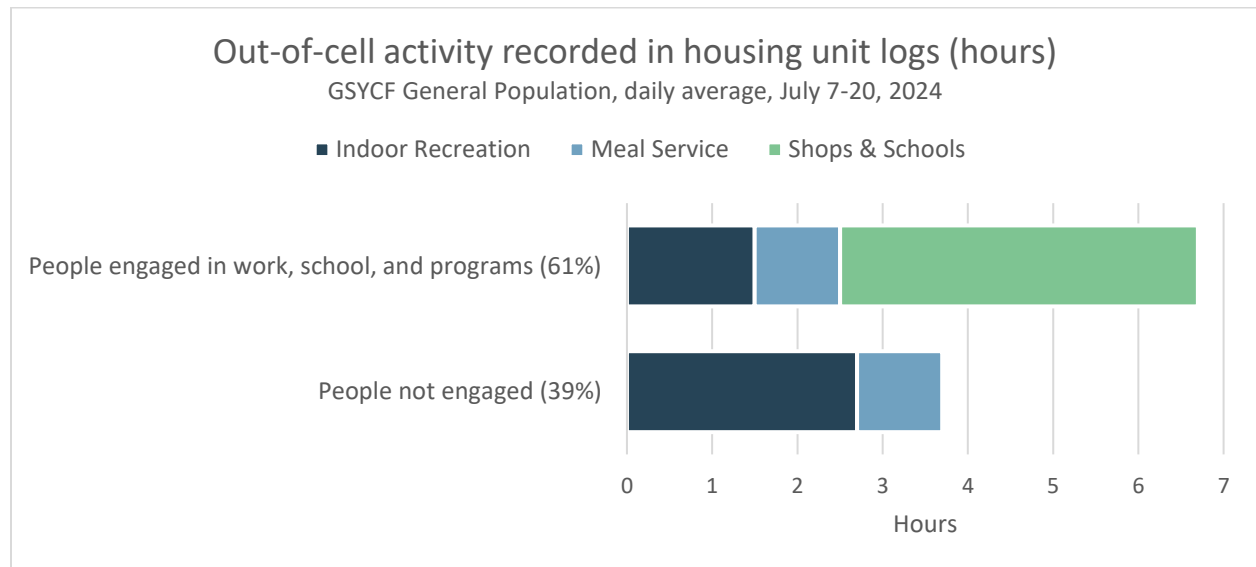
Figure 3. Engagement in jobs, school, and programs



The facility schedule allows for up to four dayroom periods per day, during which people can leave their cells to engage with others on the housing unit, take showers, make phone calls, and access the JPay kiosks. These recreation periods last between one and two-and-a-half hours, generally divvied up among the population so that those in odd- and even-numbered cells and those on the left and right sides of the unit are out at separate times. These odd and even schedule divisions were applied even on the less crowded single-celled housing units. The schedule also allows for outdoor “yard” recreation 4-5 days each week, lasting 80 minutes on average. Yard time overlaps with dayroom recreation periods. The facility’s indoor gym had been utilized in past years for extra housing, and was under construction to be restored back to indoor recreation space.

People who were not active in work, school, and programming assignments were generally out of their cells for recreation for about two and a half hours per day and could come out for meals as much as one hour per day (20 minutes per meal). Those engaged in other activities off the unit generally received less time for unstructured recreation—about an hour and a half—because passive recreation periods happen at the same time as activities in shops and school (see Figure 4). Overall, the Ombudsperson Office’s review of schedules, housing unit logs, rosters, and job assignments shows a potential for about six-and-a-half hours of daily out-of-cell time for most people who are engaged in work, school, and programming. Eleven percent of those in General Population (69 people) attended evening programs, enabling them to be engaged in out-of-cell activities an additional two to three hours per weekday (increasing the overall average, see Figure 4). These figures represent a daily average for a 14-day period. The daily totals were slightly higher on weekdays and slightly lower on weekends.^{xvii}

Figure 4. Average daily out-of-cell activity time





Housing unit library, Garden State Youth Correctional Facility, Academic Unit. Photograph by Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson, December 19, 2024.

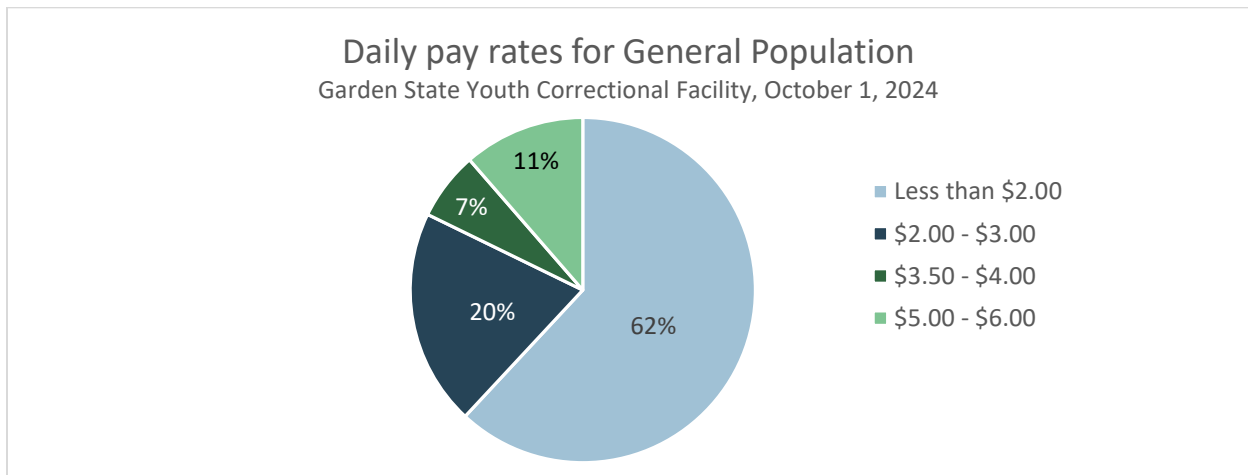


Music room, Garden State Youth Correctional Facility. Photograph by Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson, December 19, 2024.

Wages and Cost of Living

Job assignments for the population at Garden State include teacher’s aides, paralegals, clerks, plumbers, porters, janitors, and positions in the canteen, storeroom, food service, or Deptcor (correctional industries that produce goods for state use). As of June 18, 2024, about 27% of the General Population had these jobs, 12% were paid for their participation in school, and 60% were assigned the placeholder job of tier sanitation. Most of the population earned less than \$2.00 per day, and about 11% of the population made as much as \$5.00 - \$6.00 per day (see Figure 5). These pay rates reflect an increase in daily wages across all job assignments, averaging a 25% pay raise, instituted by the Department in April 2024.

Figure 5. Wages for people in General Population



State regulations dictate how a person’s earnings are garnished and deducted for various purposes. Each month, at least \$15 is preserved for the person’s discretionary spending. For those who are determined not to be indigent, 33% of their earnings per month are deducted for fines, fees, restitution, and medical debts.^{xxiii} This deduction also comes with a small transaction fee.^{xxiv} A person’s purchases at the canteen are taxed with a 10% surcharge, which is directed to a crime victim compensation fund.^{xxv}

About 100 people in Garden State custody have a job that is paid seven days per week, and more than 500 have a job that is paid five days per week. In an average month, people in custody at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility can earn \$32—\$170.50, which for those with legal financial obligations amounts to \$20—\$113 after garnishment. While toilet paper, soap, and standard issue clothing is provided for free, most personal care items and basic possessions must be purchased in the commissary. A person newly admitted to prison is provided with a “new man bag,” which includes basic hygiene items, clothing, and shower shoes. Additionally, each person processed through Intake is issued a pair of sneakers, a laundry bag, a coat (for those coming to prison between mid-October and mid-April), and three pairs of khaki pants, khaki shirts, t-shirts, boxers, and socks.

For meals, they can purchase a bowl from the canteen. They can also purchase an initial canteen kit for \$22.78 that includes a bowl and cup as well as a bath towel, washcloth, a writing pad, pen, stamped envelopes, and some additional hygiene items. Other personal care items like lotion, conditioner, dental floss, a hairbrush, razor, shaving cream, and a mirror are all available for about \$1 - \$2 each. Items like snack foods, bottled water, fans, shoes, and extra clothing are also available for purchase.

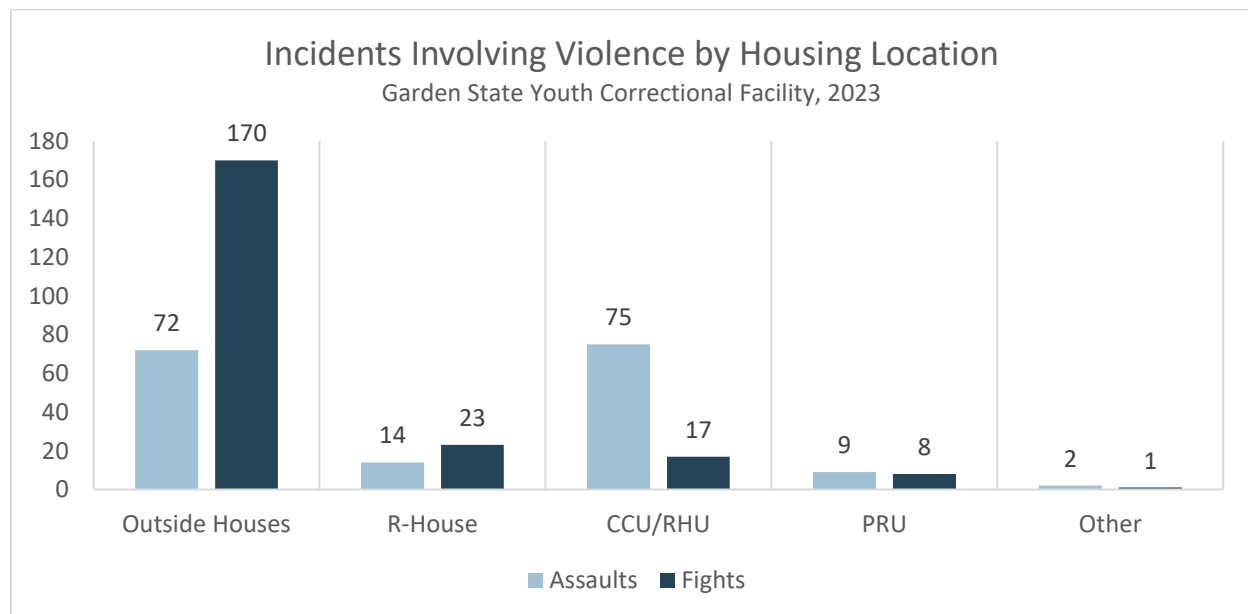
Institutional Violence and Discipline

Data covering calendar year 2023 indicate that there were 2,218 disciplinary charges stemming from 1,486 incidents at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility.^{xxvi} These incidents involved 749 unique individuals who were housed at the facility, and an additional 84 people housed in reception and awaiting a facility placement. Half of the people assigned to Garden State Youth Correctional Facility in 2023 were involved in a disciplinary incident that year.^{xxvii} This rate of disciplinary incidents is in line with estimates of disciplinary involvement in prisons nationwide.^{xxviii}

Among those who were involved in a disciplinary incident at Garden State in 2023, most were involved in only one. About a third were involved in two to three incidents during the year, and 9% were involved in four or more. Those in General Population housing units accounted for nearly two-thirds of disciplinary incidents, and those in Close Custody accounted for 20%.

Disciplinary incidents most commonly involved refusals (334 incidents), fighting or attempted fighting (219 incidents), assaults or attempted assaults (172 incidents), and use of controlled dangerous substances (116 incidents). Because some incidents resulted in more than one disciplinary charge, the Ombudsperson Office categorized the disciplinary incidents by the most serious offense in custody. The most serious offense in custody in approximately a quarter of the disciplinary incidents was an act of violence (a fight between two people, assault against an officer or another incarcerated person, or attempted fight or assault). The large majority (78%) of fights occurred among people housed in the outside houses (see Figure 6). Among the Close Custody / Restorative Housing Unit population at the facility, assaults were more common than fights. More than 70% of those assaults (53 of 75) were splashing incidents involving bodily or unidentified fluids.

Figure 6. Fights and Assaults at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility



Recommendations

The Garden State Youth Correctional Facility Administration responded quickly and decisively to concerns identified during the inspection, ranging from pillows and under-bed storage to shower maintenance, fire extinguishers, and distribution of ice. By March 31, 2025, the facility's Administration had installed new shower hardware and lighting, repaired the shower ventilation system to help reduce moisture, received a bid to remodel the showers, requested proposals for professional cleaning services, and taken steps to create an incarcerated person work detail for deep-cleaning with more powerful tools. Kitchen and meal service changes were also underway. Kitchen staff members will be trained in SERV Safe. Juice cartons were being served with meals, food was provided in clamshell containers so the population wouldn't have to use their own personal dishes, and people were given opportunities to eat their meals at tables in the housing unit day space rather than in their cells. The kitchen had been thoroughly cleaned and organized. Kitchen floors were temporarily repaired and a larger capital construction project to renovate the kitchen was funded and is now in the planning stages. This is an extraordinary level of responsiveness, and has led the Ombudsperson Office to significantly narrow the focus of its policy and practice recommendations.

The Office would like to add to the chorus of voices calling for additional capital improvement funds to repair, replace, and maintain the infrastructure at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility, and applauds the Department for continuing to seek the funding it needs to provide a habitable and structurally sound facility.

The Ombudsperson Office recommends that the Department of Corrections:

1. Develop a long-term strategic plan to assess and limit the portion of the incarcerated population that is double-bunked in sub-standard cells (based on square footage).
2. Set an achievable quarterly performance goal to increase General Population participation in job assignments, school, and other programming, monitoring whether those benchmarks are met, and recognizing/rewarding the facility's staff and incarcerated population for achieving those goals.
3. Schedule a proactive and recurring cell-to-cell inventory of maintenance needs and missing essential items with achievable deadlines to address the identified needs.
4. Utilize the new food services supervisor to routinely inspect and audit kitchen staffing, sanitation, food temperature control, and meal and beverage service.
5. Consider reducing the cost of initial commissary packages that provide basic necessities.

ⁱ Established in 1967, Garden State Youth Correctional Facility was originally utilized as both a reception center and a facility to house younger people sentenced to state prison, historically including people as young as age 15. In 1997, reception was moved from Garden State (R-house) to the newly opened Central Reception and Assignment Facility (CRAF). In 2021, Garden State absorbed two additional housing units (PRU 3 and 4) and once again became the reception center for admissions to state prison from county jails.

ⁱⁱ General Population here refers to the incarcerated population placed in housing units at the facility other than close custody, minimum security, or reception.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Vulnerable” is defined in Department of Corrections policy as people 21 years old or younger, 65 years old or older; people with serious medical conditions, significant audio or visual impairment, developmental disabilities, or disability based on mental illness; and people perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex. Department of Corrections Internal Management Procedure ADM.019.003. The policy also includes people who are pregnant or were recently pregnant, which is not applicable to the population at GSCF.

^{iv} Historical capital improvement plans, including Department of Corrections requests and Capital Commission recommendations, are available at: <https://www.nj.gov/treasury/omb/archived-2000budgetpubs.shtml>.

^v State regulations require the Department of Corrections to provide each person in custody with a bureau, locker, or closet that can be secured for the storage of clothing, except in unusual circumstances. N.J.A.C. §10A:14-5.10.

^{vi} Interoffice Communication to Institutional Administrators from Erin Nardelli, Deputy Commissioner, Division of Operations, *Excessive Heat Mitigation* (May 8, 2024).

^{vii} See N.J.A.C. §10A:31-3.6.

^{viii} Report of the Governor’s Task Force on Prison Overcrowding (Dec. 3, 1981), *available at* <https://dspace.njstatelib.org/items/8357fa6a-2d29-4140-8a8f-290b86a3c904>.

^{ix} *Id.*, Attachment D, p. 4.

^x Hearing of the New Jersey Senate Committee on Institutions, Health, and Welfare (Feb. 18, 1982). *Transcript and testimony available at* <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/public-hearing-new-jersey-senate-institutions-health-and-welfare>.

^{xi} See New Jersey Correctional Master Plan Policy Council (Mar. 1977), New Jersey Correctional Master Plan Report and Recommendations, *available at* <https://dspace.njstatelib.org/items/eea8e404-25cd-4742-8e71-8e9c7be9ca9f>.

^{xii} *Id.*; See New York Times (Oct. 6, 1976), “Byrne Signs Bill Creating Prison Agency,” *available at* <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/10/06/archives/byrne-signs-bill-creating-prison-agency-and-says-mulcahy-will-be.html>.

^{xiii} New Jersey Correctional Master Plan Report and Recommendations, pp. 19, 103, 108-109, and 113, *available at* <https://dspace.njstatelib.org/items/eea8e404-25cd-4742-8e71-8e9c7be9ca9f>.

^{xiv} *Id.* Volume 2, page 128.

^{xv} Average daily population and operational capacity published annually in state budget records available at <https://nj.gov/treasury/omb/archived-80budgetpubs.shtml>.

^{xvi} See *id.*

^{xvii} Reeves & Tamburello (2014), *Single Cells, Segregated Housing, and Suicide in the New Jersey Department of Corrections*, *J. Am. Acad. Psychiatry Law* (42), 484-488, *available at* <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25492075/>. This study of suicides in New Jersey prisons found a significant correlation between single cell housing and suicides. It also warned that double-cell housing might increase opportunities for violence, and may be inadvisable for incarcerated people who have been identified as higher risk for violence.

^{xviii} Daily population and operational capacity are published annually in state budget records, *available at* <https://www.nj.gov/treasury/omb/index.shtml#currentpubs> (click publication in navigation bar). Operational capacity is defined in the 2014 Annual Budget. The last budget year to report design capacity was 2012. 2015 budget confirms “actual” numbers for 2013 average daily population. Archived budgets (before 1987) can be found at New Jersey State Library, State Publications Digital Library, *available at* <https://dspace.njstatelib.org/home>.

^{xix} The Ombudsperson Office analyzed enrollment rosters from July 5 – July 24, 2024 by individual for each activity type. This included Adult Basic Education (enrollees pursuing high school equivalency), State Facilities Education Act (enrollees pursuing a high school diploma), and NJSTEP (enrollees pursuing a college degree), therapeutic and rehabilitative programming (Helping Offenders Parent Effectively, Thinking for a Change, Cage your Rage, Family

Reunification and Transition, Successful Employment through Lawful Living and Conflict Management, Successful Transition and Reentry Series, and Providing Access to Community Employment), vocational programming and trades (such as woodwork, metal welding, etc.), and music enrichment. The Office accounted for individuals enrolled in multiple programs and also referenced the job roster from July 18, 2024. All data was merged and analyzed at the individual student/participant level, and cross-walked with housing unit schedules and logs.

^{xx} “Tier Sanitation” or “Cell Sanitation” are placeholder job titles that provide a small daily wage to people without a work assignment for maintaining their living space. The assignment does not come with specific job duties and does not translate to increased out-of-cell time. Of the 651 people in the facility’s General Population during the snapshot date, 11 people had no job assignment, 390 were assigned cell sanitation, 173 were assigned a job other than cell sanitation, and 77 were full-time students.

^{xxi} A small number of people enrolled in programs and education at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility were not housed in the General Population. These individuals who lived in close custody, reception, or the full minimum security unit were excluded from the data in our analysis. Specifically, 10 unique individuals enrolled in high school, 13 enrolled in Adult Basic Education, 1 enrolled in college, 6 enrolled in therapeutic programs, and 9 enrolled in vocational programs were assigned to Garden State Youth Correctional Facility, but did not live in the General Population housing.

^{xxii} To approximate average out-of-cell time for those who were not engaged in school, work, or programs without comprehensive individual-level data, the Ombudsperson Office recorded beginning and end times of each passive recreation period and meal in a 14-day housing unit log sample. For those actively engaged in school, work, and programs, the Office accounted for beginning and end times for all movements off the unit recorded in the 14-day log sample for shops and school, deducting passive recreation periods that would have been missed for those off the unit. 69 individuals attended classes or programs outside of the shops and school movement periods. Out-of-cell time was approximated as a daily average for the 14-day period. The daily totals were slightly higher on weekdays and slightly lower on weekends. Records show that outdoor “yard” time was being offered up to 5 hours per week. These yard periods ran concurrently with indoor recreation periods, so they did not appear to result in additional total out-of-cell time offered.

^{xxiii} The facility’s business office provides incarcerated individuals with a financial statement of the balance in their trust account, including outstanding fines and fees.

^{xxiv} N.J.A.C. §10A:2-2.2.

^{xxv} *Id.*; N.J.S.A. §30:4-15.1.

^{xxvi} The Ombudsperson Office received all disciplinary charge and sanction data. The data was isolated by institution and all incidents occurring in a facility or Residential Community Reintegration Center other than Garden State Youth Correctional Facility were removed. Unique charges and incidents were identified by location and date utilizing the Department of Corrections ITag database to confirm the number of disciplinary events for those with multiple incident identifiers on the same date. Nearly all charges occurring at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility were recorded in the original data as unique incidents. For accuracy, events that occurred in the same location and timeframe were counted by the Ombudsperson Office as a single incident, even if it resulted in multiple separate charges (similar to a single arrest event that results in multiple criminal charges). Housing unit information for those involved in incidents was confirmed using ITag. Incidents were organized in the data by severity of offense, using the Department of Corrections’ offense scale.

^{xxvii} 1,484 people were assigned to Garden State Youth Correctional Facility at some point in 2023.

^{xxviii} Beatty, Snell & Bukhler (2019), Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates 2016, *available at* <https://bjs.ojp.gov/data-collection/survey-prison-inmates-spi#3-0>, disciplinary data analyzed in Nam-Sonenstein & Haney (2025), Prison Policy Initiative, Bad Behavior: How prison disciplinary policies manufacture misconduct (finding 53% of national prison survey respondents reported having a disciplinary violation in the previous year).