

OCO Inspection of Garden State Correctional Facility

April 29, 2022 - Housing Unit East 1

Conducted by: Assistant Ombudspersons Carla Gardner, Amy Southwick, & Kristin King

INTRODUCTION

Garden State Youth Correctional Facility (GSYCF) opened in 1968 and is located in Crosswicks, New Jersey. The reported population is 997 persons as of January 12, 2021, per the Department of Corrections' website. The institutions general population units' house incarcerated persons aged eighteen to thirty years of age. The facility is also comprised of a restorative housing unit and the Department of Corrections' Reception Center. On April 29, 2022 the Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson (OCO) conducted an unannounced inspection at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility East 1 housing unit. East 1 is designated as a general population unit with a capacity of 132 persons. On the day of the inspection the unit's count was 103 persons. There are currently three cells on the unit closed due to leaks in the ceiling. The inspection consisted of data collection, observation, and interviews of both staff and incarcerated persons. It was conducted by two Assistant Ombudspersons with the assistance of the assigned Assistant Ombudsperson of the facility. The weather was brisk in the morning for late April with a reported low of 38 degrees Fahrenheit and high of 61 degrees in the afternoon.

The Assistant Ombudspersons arrived at the facility at 5:55 am. Upon arrival the Assistants were required to complete the required security checks. To reach the desired housing unit the Assistant Ombudspersons walked through the main facility. The hallways were well-lit and clear of debris and trash. A leak from the ceiling was seen in the hallway by the OCO. A bucket with a caution sign was placed beneath it. PREA posters are hung throughout the main building. The Assistant Ombudspersons continued this path across the outside courtyard (Photograph #1 & #2). The courtyard was clean and the grass well maintained. East 1 is comprised of an entryway with adjacent rooms that act as day spaces for passive recreation and three conjoining hallways with cells on either side for housing and showers. They are designated by names A, B, and C wings.

SECTION I: LIVING QUARTERS

Observations

The entryway doubles as an officers' station and for the unit's meal distribution. When entering the East 1 housing unit the OCO immediately noticed the lighting was poor. Many lightbulbs throughout the hallways, day spaces and entry way are in need of replacement. The only PREA poster hung in the unit is in this main entryway (Photograph #3). The poster is not at eye level, but hung near the ceiling above the mess distribution. The OCO suggests the inclusion of additional posters to be hung in each dayroom specifically near incarcerated person telephones. Security cameras and up to date fire extinguishers are available on the tier. Body cameras are not yet available at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility. During the inspection the OCO found most staff and incarcerated persons appropriately wearing masks, but not all. No rodents and/or excrement were observed, but it was reported to the Assistants by incarcerated persons that mice are present on the unit. Custody staff advised an exterminator visits the

facility once weekly for control. The unit was relatively clean, but some debris was noticed such as discarded masks left in the day spaces and corridors (Photographs #4 & #5).

East 1 housing unit temperature was cool. The temperature in the entryway was recorded at 67 degrees Fahrenheit upon arrival. Yet the day spaces and cells were recorded much cooler, measuring between 60 to 65 degrees. Many windows were observed to be open in both locations allowing the cool morning air to enter the building. It was observed that many windows were shut also allowed an incoming draft. Others were noticed to have plastic coverings to block the cold air. There were many window screens blocked with dust which made it difficult to see outside (Photograph #6). The Assistant Ombudspersons found the unit to be uncomfortable in temperature even though being appropriately dressed for the season. Many incarcerated persons were viewed wearing their thermal long sleeved shirts underneath their state issued khakis. The cells varied in temperature as well depending on the status of the incarcerated person's window. The cells consisted of bunk beds, toilet, sink and shelving (Photograph #7 & 8). Many of the cells viewed were in need of fresh paint. The mattresses viewed appeared thin, discolored and tattered (Photograph #9 & #10). The pillows were aged and could use replacement (Photograph #11). The OCO interviewed all available incarcerated persons during the inspections. The housing concerns varied from a leaks in the ceiling and toilet and an inoperable window. All matters were reported to the Correctional Police Major for remedy. All persons interviewed advised they had the appropriate bedding other than pillows. Ten incarcerated persons reported they did not have a pillow. This was referred to the Correctional Police Major and the wing was investigated to resolve this issue. The outcome found all persons to be in possession of a pillow.

Both the population and custody notified the OCO that the unit is cleaned at least twice a day. Once on first shift and again on second shift. On the weekends the unit allocates time for the cleaning of the cells. The OCO was able to view utility closets on the wing. During interviews with the population most individuals reported they are able to access cleaning supplies by request as well.

The unit offers two showers on each wing for a total of six showers. The showers are in separate rooms. There is a curtain at the entrance to provide privacy. The shower rooms consist of a changing area in the front and towards the rear, a separate space with a shower head (Photograph #12). All showers were found to be in working order; however, all but one shower had dim lighting. The Assistant Ombudspersons viewed missing and cracked tiles, peeling paint on the ceilings and discoloration in the grout and tiles (Photographs #13, #14, & #15). The stains appeared to be possible mildew and rust (Photograph #16). The showers were found to have discarded soap, shaving razor, hair, and other discarded items (Photographs #17 & #18). One shower in C Wing had standing water (Photograph #19 & #20) and a B Wing shower was found to have small insects possibly a gnats and or drain flies.

Recommendations

- Posting of additional PREA posters in common areas.
- The OCO suggests the staff and population be reminded when necessary to adhere to the Department's mask mandate. For repeat offenders, the appropriate disciplinary process should be followed.
- Regular maintenance, repainting, and cleaning within the housing unit to include the cells.
- The OCO suggests the windows are inspected to determine if they are in working order. Clean or replace window screens.
- Retiling, repair and deep cleaning of shower stalls.

- The OCO recommends increasing the regular scheduling of an exterminator to help reduce the presence of insects and rodents on the unit.
- Replace mattresses and pillows that are in poor condition with better quality ones.

SECTION II: COMMUNICATIONS

Observations

The facility's population is provided three main ways of communicating with loved ones; posted letters, JPay, and telephones. East 1 offers a total of 14 telephones and 5 JPay kiosks between the three wings (Photographs #21 & #22). All are in working order. The unit does not offer a direct mail box for outgoing mail. To access the mailbox for stamped mail the individual must leave the tier, cross the courtyard to the main building. The incarcerated persons and custody staff advised during interviews they are offered use of the telephones and JPay kiosks during inside/passive recreation.

The OCO did not observe a central location for the incarcerated persons to acquire institutional forms. The forms allow the population to request medical services, OCO assistance, submit a claim for missing and/or damaged property, or submit a discrepancy with the Department of Correction's telephone carrier, ViaPath Technologies (formerly known as GTL). The Assistant Ombudspersons inquired to the housing unit officers of their whereabouts. To the OCO's surprise the forms were all maintained in the officer's desk. The officer was professional and well organized being able to locate all the forms requested, but the OCO strongly urges the forms be moved to a central location with incarcerated persons' access. The inclusion of shelving in the entryway near the meal distribution or within the day spaces would allow the population better access in obtaining these forms, especially the OCO and DOC grievance forms. Additionally, the only mailbox available on the unit is for Social Services (Photograph #23). As with the stamped mail, the individual must be permitted entrance to the main facility to submit the remedy forms. The mailboxes are available near the institution's property, canteen and learning center which makes it a high trafficked area (Photograph #24). Custody personnel advised those incarcerated persons who are not scheduled for an appointment or class ask an officer or peer to drop off their forms and letters, leaving little confidentiality.

Recommendations

- The OCO recommends established protocols to afford the population the opportunity to individually deliver their correspondence.
- The addition of shelving for the institutional forms placed in a high traffic area to allow anonymity.
- Offer an additional period for the housing unit to access the JPay kiosks and telephones during morning hours.

SECTION III: RECREATION

Observations

Two types of recreation are provided to the population on East 1 housing unit. The first being passive or indoor recreation. During passive recreation the incarcerated persons are able to access the JPay kiosks,

telephones, and the showers. The unit may also utilize the day space, which has tables with attached stools, televisions and the JPay kiosks (Photograph #25 & #26). The institution provides checkers, chess, cards, etc. and individuals may purchase their own to use during this time. Passive recreation is provided for one hour each day in the afternoon.

The second type of recreation is active recreation. Currently, active recreation takes place in the yard in fenced in circles called pods. These pods offer basketball, wall ball, power tower, and an abdominal bench (Photographs #27 & #28). Active recreation is offered four days in a row with the fifth day being an off day to allow a rotation for the facility. Active recreation is for approximately one and a half hours in the afternoon. The pods have a maximum occupancy of 75 persons each. Therefore, the unit rotates the wings each day allowing the first persons the option of participating in outdoor or indoor recreation until the limit is reached for the outdoor recreation pods. Unfortunately, the passive recreation and outdoor recreation occur at the same times daily. Therefore, at times, the outdoor and indoor recreation periods may overlap for the wing. In this situation, the incarcerated person must choose to utilize the shower, kiosk, and/or telephone or enjoy the outdoors. In an interview with one incarcerated person he advised the OCO the choice was simple, he would prefer to talk to his loved ones on the telephone then go outside. This is disappointing as the population should have the opportunity to access both on their scheduled active recreation day. Favorably, the Correctional Police Major advised the Assistant Ombudspersons the incorporation of an evening outdoor recreation period which is presently being offered due to the longer day light in the evening hours. As well as advising the OCO of the gymnasium reopening for an alternative active recreation space during inclement weather. The gymnasium was recently restored with the installation of a new flooring. The OCO was able to observe the progress by touring the gym. The gymnasium is large with multiple basketball courts and high ceilings (Photograph #29). There is a separate stage which would service well for weight machines (Photograph #30). While the gymnasium offers potential there is much to be done as the OCO viewed birds nesting in the windows leaving feathers and their droppings on the renovated floor. Nonetheless, the OCO looks forward to seeing the progress with this space.

Recommendations

- The OCO recommends the inclusion of a morning indoor recreation period to allow for increased out of cell time.
- The OCO promotes the implementation of an additional evening active recreation period and the incorporation of an alternative indoor space.

SECTION IV: PROGRAMMING

Observations

GSYCF offers an array of programming through its Education and Social Services Departments. The Social Services Department currently offers five different programs: STARS (Successful Transition and Re-Entry Program), FRAT (Family Reunification and Transition), SEALL (Successful Employment and Lawful Living), T4C (Thinking for a Change) and CYR (Cage your Rage). Unfortunately, SEALL and FRAT must rotate due to space restrictions. Another program, Helping Offenders Parent Effectively (HOPE), is presently unavailable due to a staff shortage. STARS and T4C both have extensive waiting lists with over one hundred individuals waiting for each program. This most likely is a byproduct of the COVID19 mitigation

tactics which reduces the number of participants for social distancing. The OCO is hopeful as restrictions are lifted more incarcerated persons will be able to participate and the waiting lists will be at a manageable number.

During the inspection the OCO toured the Education area known as the Learning Center. The Learning Center consists of a long hallway lined with classrooms and educational offices on either side. The hallway is welcoming with inspirational quotes painted along its walls. The Learning Center has nine classrooms, all are bright and decorated with educational décor and student artwork (Photographs #31 & #32). The classrooms are modern with computers and large smart boards (Photographs #33 & 34). The OCO had the pleasure of watching a demonstration of the smart board provided by the institution's art teacher. The Assistant Ombudspersons did take notice of peeling paint on the ceilings that could be improved with a fresh application (Photograph #35). The courses provided at GSYCF encompass all ranges from collegiate (NJSTEP) to elementary adult basic education as well as vocational programs such as cosmetology, carpentry and welding. The OCO reviewed the wait lists for the programs offered at GSYCF. The OCO was advised by the Education Supervisor popular subjects, such as cosmetology and welding, have more of an extensive waiting list because of their popularity and COVID19 restrictions, but believes these numbers will reduce as the class size limitations have become less strict. Due to the facility being designated for youthful incarcerated persons the institution provides the State Facility Education Act (SFEA). This is a mandatory educational program targeting those individuals 21 years of age and under including Child Study Team (CTS).

The OCO continued the tour to the institution's library (Photograph #36). The library is large with smaller rooms attached. The smaller rooms are still quite adequate in size and consist of computers and the law library (Photographs #37 & #38). The Assistant Ombudspersons viewed the library to be in overall good condition; however, a leak from the ceiling with a bucket placed on top of a book shelf was noticed (Photograph #39).

Recommendations

- With the guidance of the Health Services Unit the implementation of additional cycles and number of groups to promote increased incarcerated persons participation within the facility.
- Routine maintenance of the Learning Center and library to include repair and repainting of ceiling.

SECTION V: FOOD SERVICE

Observations

During the inspection of East 1, the OCO had the opportunity to observe and participate in the morning mess. Breakfast was delivered to the unit at approximately 7 am. The food service workers made the work look easy as they set up the morning's meal on the warming table. They adorned gloves and masks, but did not wear hair coverings. Warming tables were turned on to keep the food warm, but no refrigeration was seen being in use for cold items. The milk cartons were stacked in crates on a nearby table until service. The unit started its daily routine in a matter of minutes as the first wing was called to collect their meal. The OCO took notice as the incarcerated persons all provided their own bowls for breakfast (Photograph #40). Both the population and custody advised this office that the incarcerated persons purchase the bowls upon entry to the facility as emergency canteen. They can buy a bowl and spoon. The OCO was notified that plates and forks were not made available to the population. This does

raise some concerns regarding sanitation. At times the serving spoons tapped a person's bowl during serving to distribute the portion. The population must wash their own bowls and utensils in their cell. It is understood there are both security and COVID concerns; however, the institution should visit alternative vessels and utensils that are thoroughly washed by the food service department after each use.

Breakfast included grits, scrambled eggs, wheat bread, milk and bananas (Photographs #41 & #42). The food was found to be adequate in portion (Photographs #43). The grits were fluffy and pleasing in taste. Sugar packets were made available to sweeten them if one so desired. The eggs were served at room temperature. They were fine in flavor, but would be more appetizing at a warmer temperature. The bread was found to be fresh. The bananas were in need of additional time to ripen as they were greener in color. The OCO did not eat the offered fruit as it is a popular item, and wanted to ensure the extra were provided to those who wanted them. The milk was dated May 3 and while it was not refrigerated with the cooler temperatures on the unit it remained cold. Overall, the meal was adequate. As the temperatures will only increase in the upcoming weeks the OCO will monitor the cold food portions.

Recommendations

- The implementation of a different container for meals to promote a cleaner and sanitary food distribution.
- Mechanism to keep food and beverages cold.
- Ensure all food handlers are wearing the appropriate safety gear to include hairnets and/or caps.

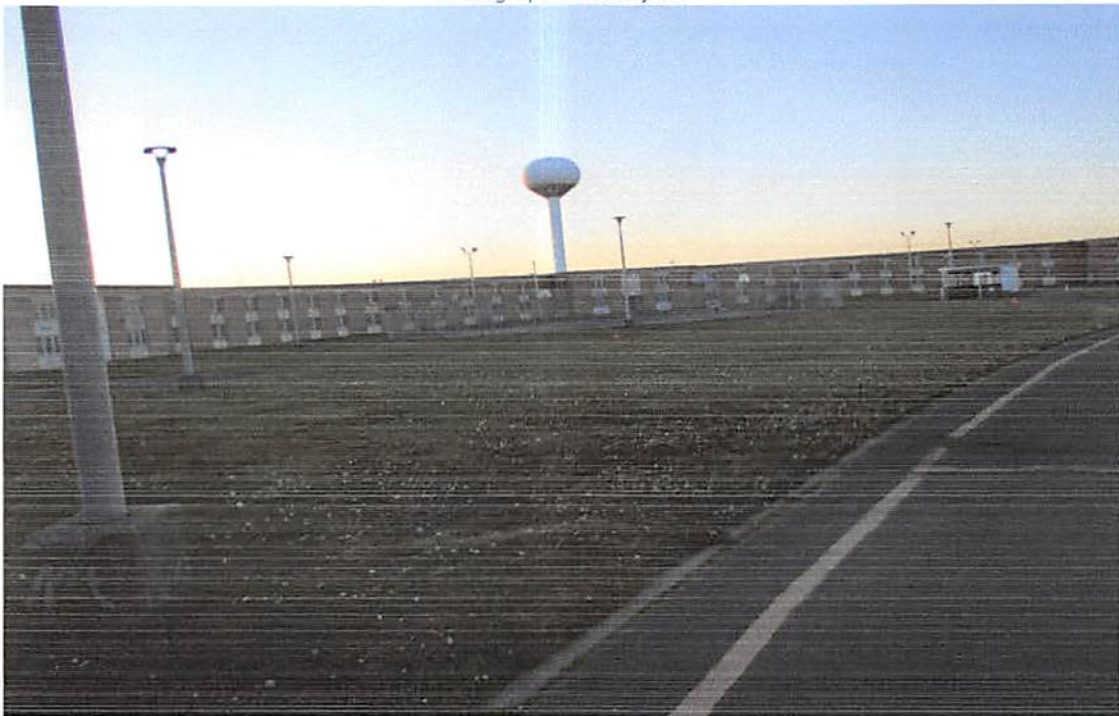
CONCLUSION

The inspection concluded approximately 11:45 am. Overall, Garden State Youth Correctional Facility is well maintained and offers a variety of programs and courses. The staff were accommodating and knowledgeable during the inspection. The OCO took notice of many leaks from the ceiling throughout the institution including educational areas, hallways, and the housing unit. The facility would benefit from regular maintenance and cleaning of its buildings. The inclusion of a morning recreation period should be considered to encourage out of cell congregation time for the youthful incarcerated persons. Lastly, the OCO suggests the institution take into account a different manner of dinnerware that promotes hygienic practices.

Addendum



Photograph #1 Courtyard



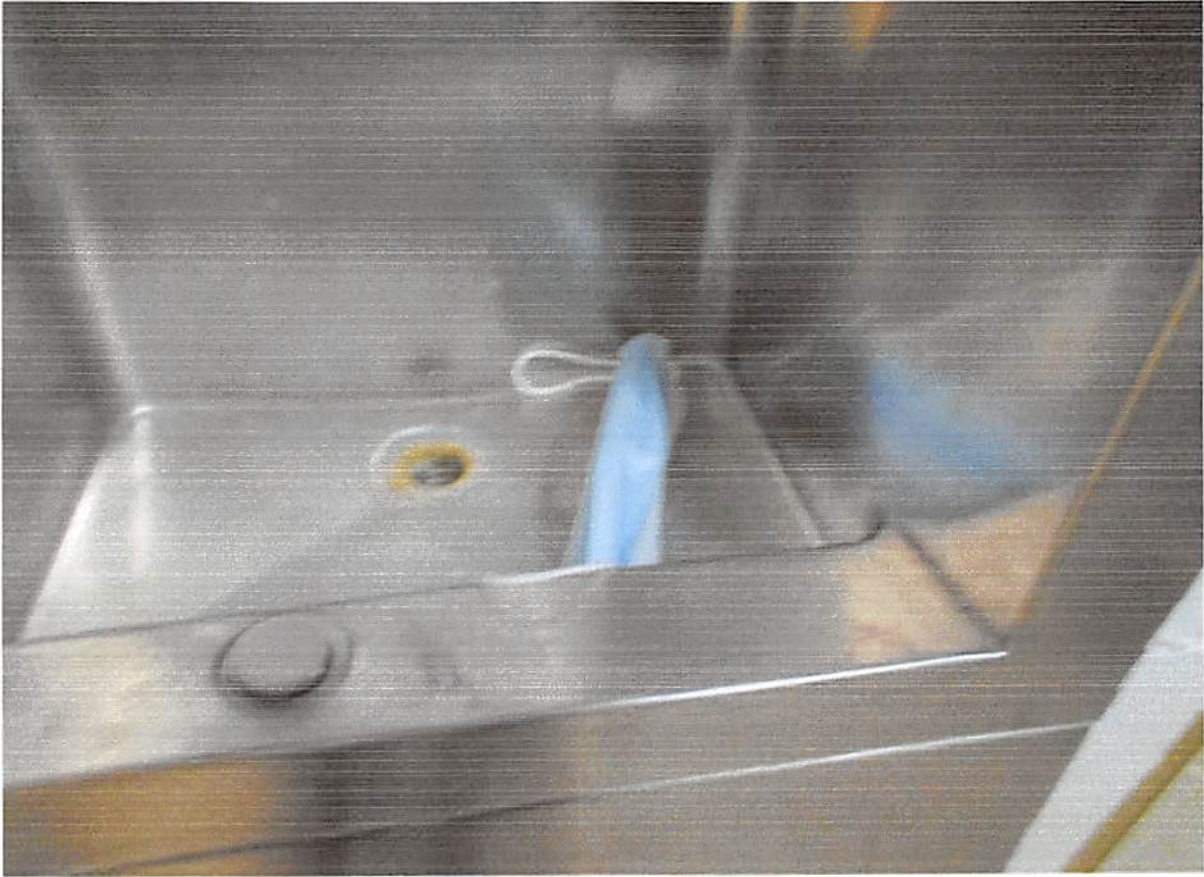
Photograph #2 Courtyard



Photograph #3 PREA Posters



Photograph #4 Discarded mask



Photograph #5 Discarded Mask



Photograph #6 Windows with screens



Photograph #7 Cell



Photograph #8 Sink



Photograph #9 Mattress



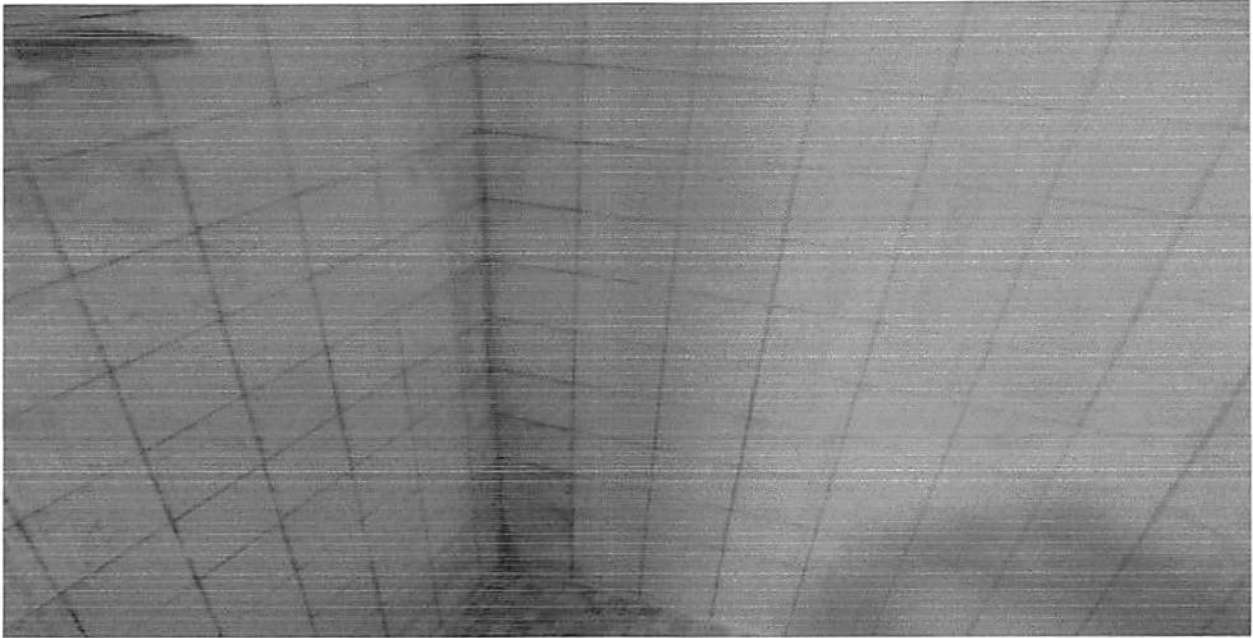
Photograph #10 Mattress viewed in vacant cell.



Photograph #11 Pillows



Photograph #12 Shower entrance



Photograph #13 Discoloration on tile and grout



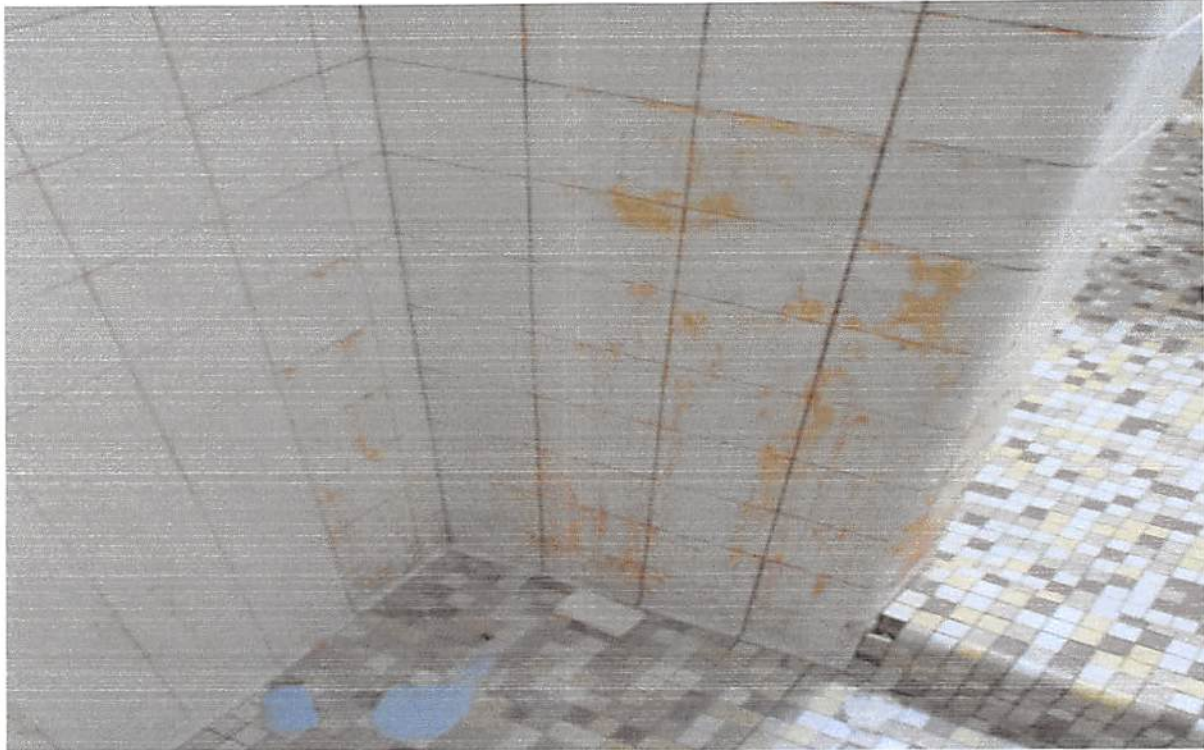
Photograph #14 Broken tiles



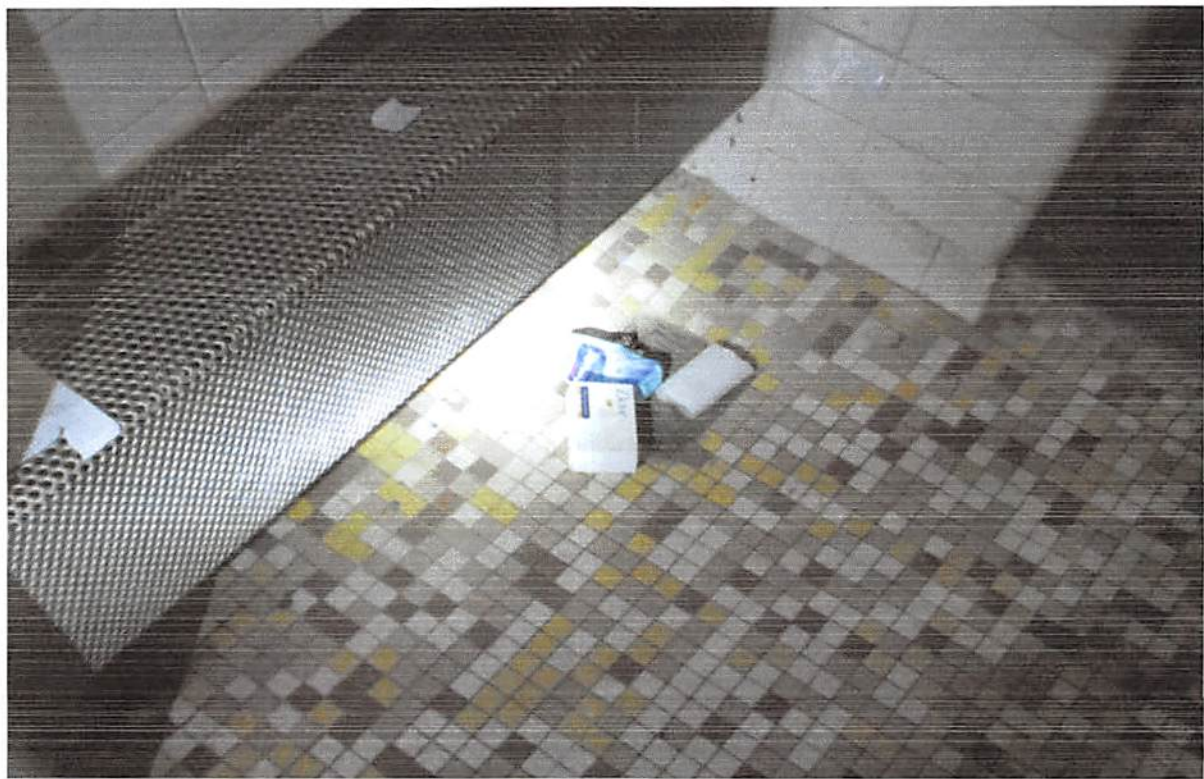
Photograph #15 Shower Ceiling



Photograph #16 Discoloration and missing tile



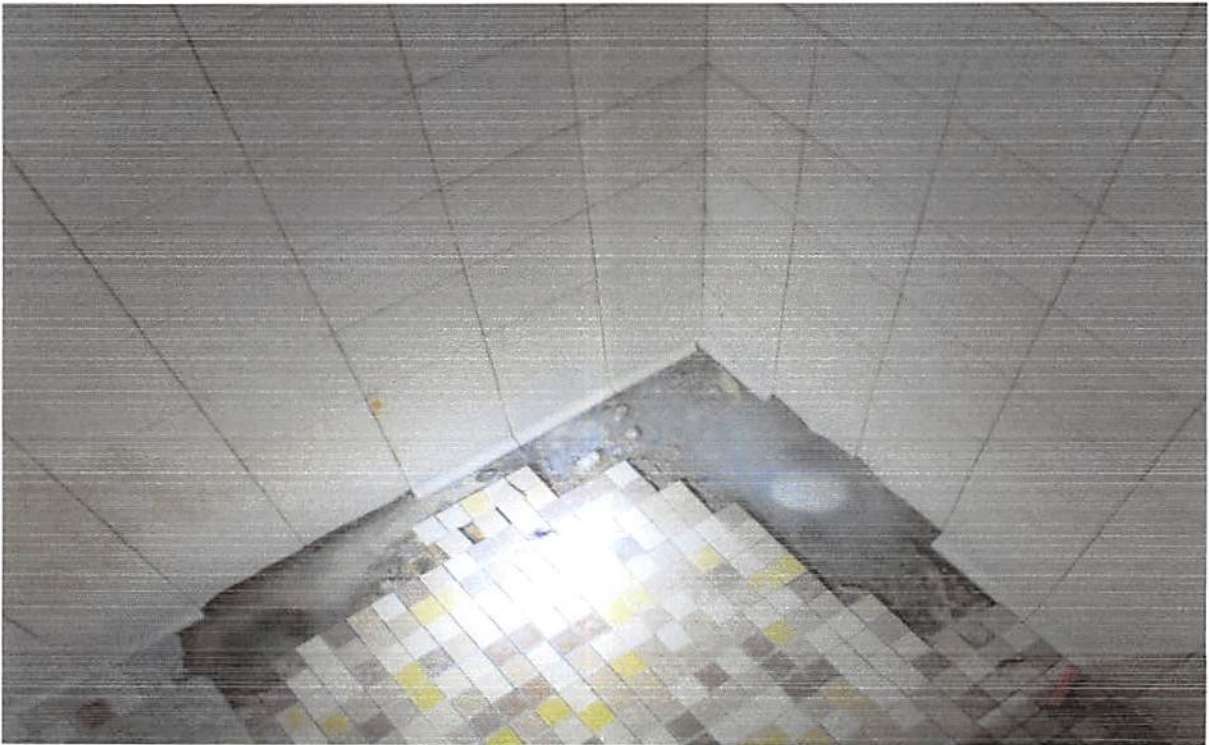
Photograph #17 Discarded items in shower



Photograph #18 Discarded items in shower



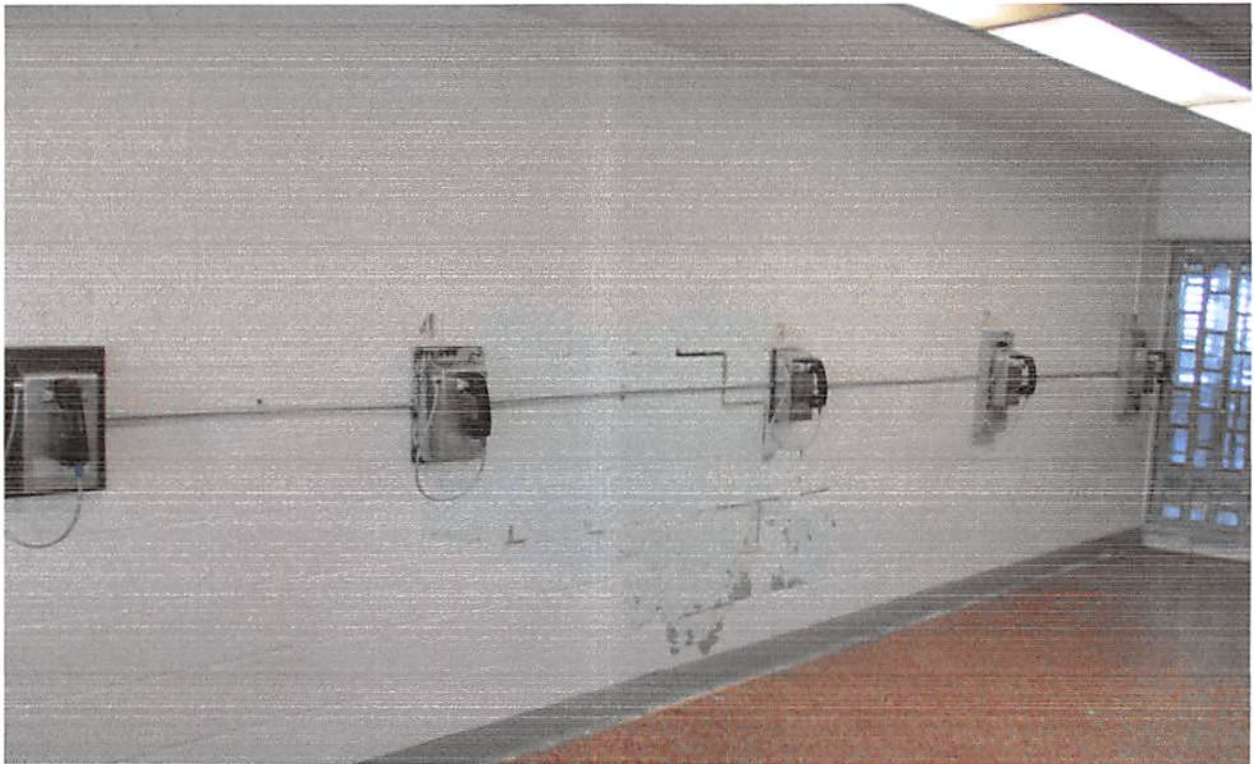
Photograph #19 Standing water in shower



Photograph #20 Standing water and missing tiles



Photograph #21 JPay kiosks



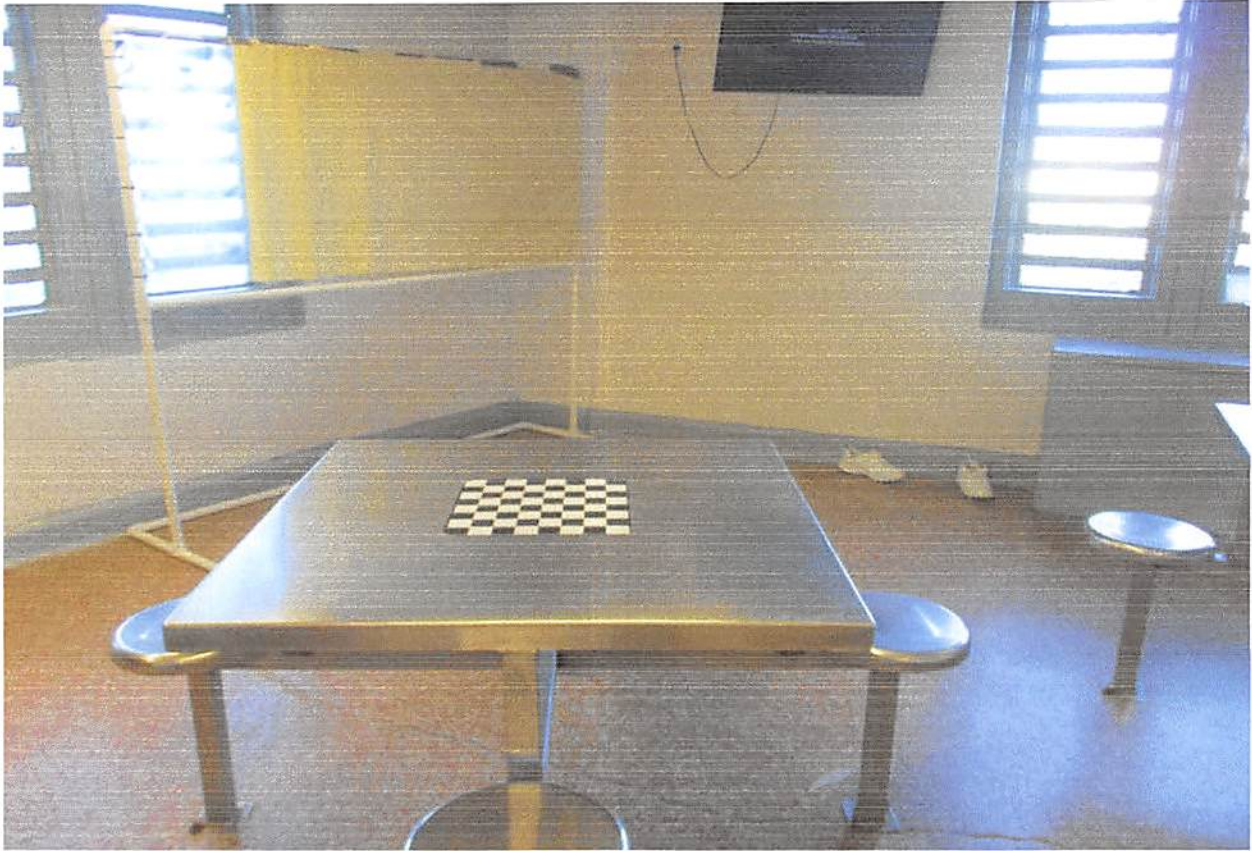
Photograph #22 Telephones



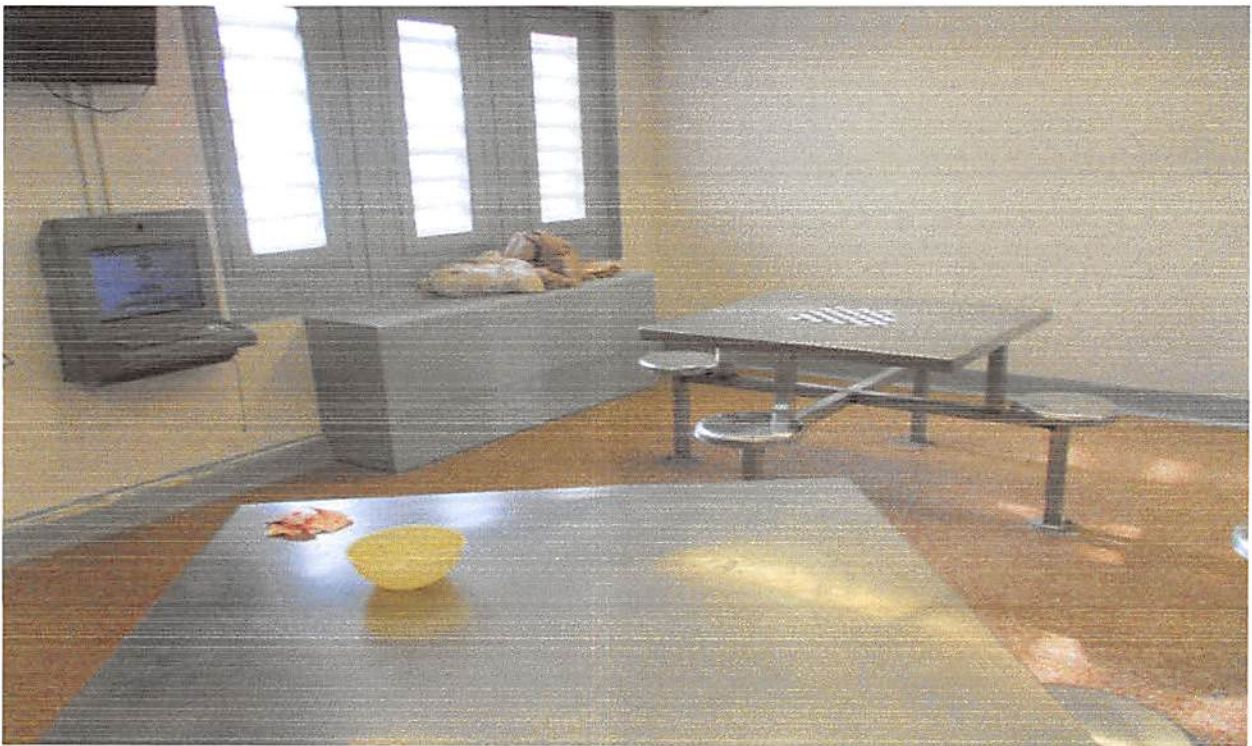
Photograph #23 Social Services mailbox



Photograph #24 Mailboxes



Photograph #25 Day room



Photograph #26 Day room



Photograph #27 Recreation Pod



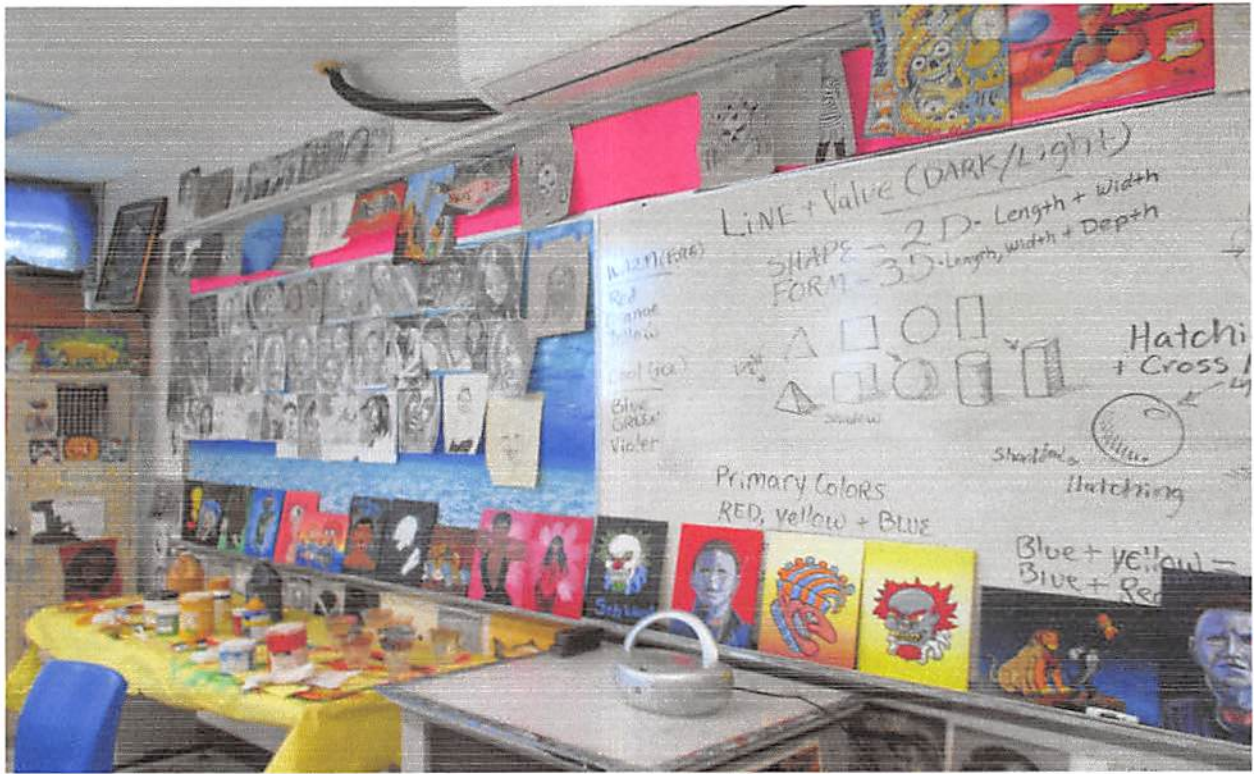
Photograph #28 Power tower and push up bars



Photograph #29 Gymnasium



Photograph #30 Gymnasium stage with pull-up bars



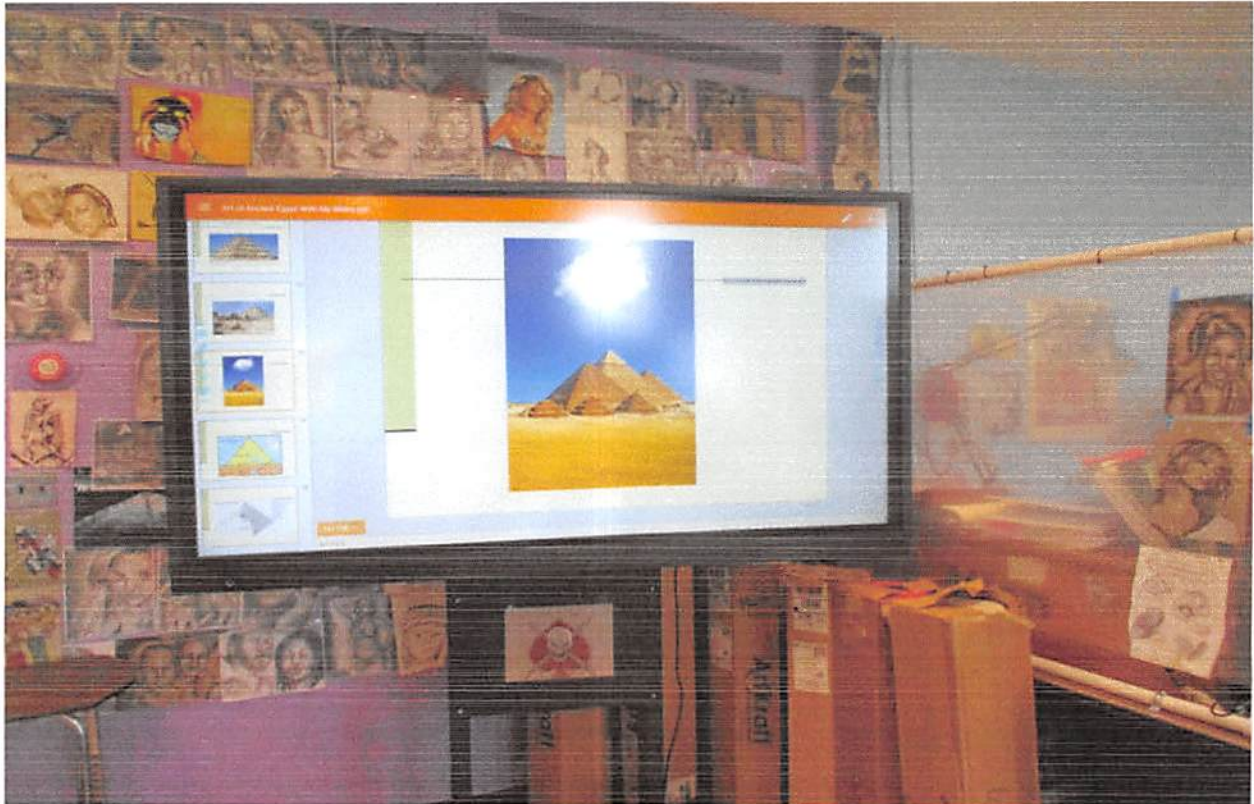
Photograph #31 Art classroom



Photograph #32 Classroom



Photograph #33 Classroom with computers



Photograph #34 Smart board



Photograph #35 Classroom ceiling



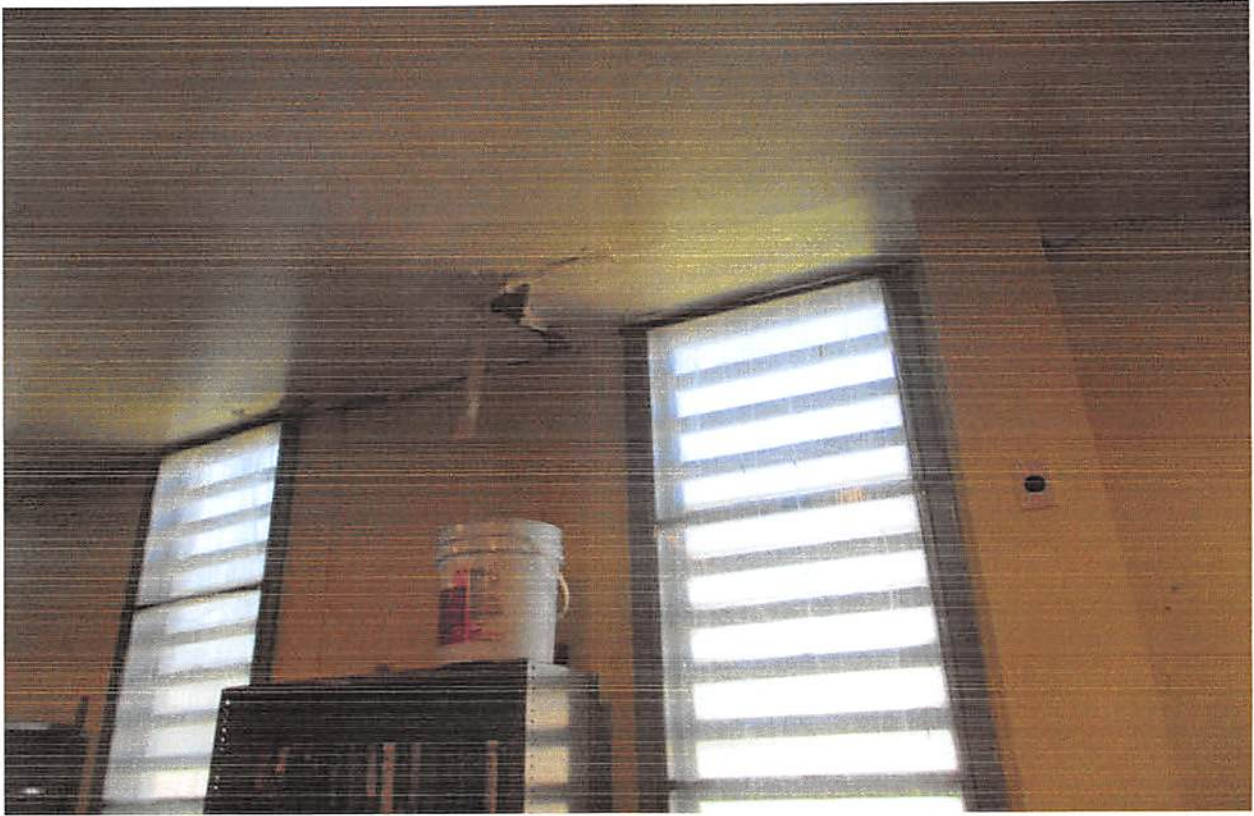
Photograph #36 Library



Photograph #37 Library computers



Photographs #38 Law Library



Photograph #39 Leak in library ceiling



Photograph # 40 Incarcerated person's meal



Photograph #41 Grits and scrambled eggs on warming table



Photograph #42 Bread, bananas, and milk ready for distribution



Photograph #43 Meal provided to OCO on plate

This report was forwarded to the Administration at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility on May 9, 2022 for their review and feedback. Their response was received on May 11, 2022 and is posted below. The OCO will continue to monitor the facility's recreation policies and food service and looks forward to seeing the progress with the renovations of the gymnasium.



State of New Jersey


DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
GARDEN STATE YOUTH CORRECTIONAL FACILITY
55 HOGBACK RD
CROSSWICKS, NJ 08515

PHILIP D. MURPHY
Governor

SHEILA Y. OLIVER
Lt. Governor

VICTORIA L. KUHN, ESQ.
Acting Commissioner

TO: Ms. Kristin King - Ombudsperson

FROM: David Richards, Administrator 

DATE: May 11, 2022

SUBJECT: OCO inspection of Garden State Correctional Facility

In response to the deficiencies observed during the inspection of Garden State Correctional Facility, please accept the attached document as our response and corrective action plan which is in the process of being implemented.

- Posting of additional PREA posters in common areas.

Although GSCF passed the most recent PREA inspection, additional PREA posters will be added to the recommended areas by the PREA Coordinator.

- The OCO suggests the staff and population be reminded when necessary to adhere to the Department's mask mandate. For repeat offenders, the appropriate disciplinary process should be followed.

COVID Mitigation and Masking Mandate memorandums have been sent out by GSCF Administration and the Major's Office. This practice will continue and progressive discipline may be enacted for those violating the directives.

- Regular maintenance, repainting, and cleaning within the housing unit to include the cells.

Maintenance and Infrastructure Improvement is a very high priority for GSCF Administration. Cell sanitation is a daily occurrence and unit repairs are being planned systematically.

- The OCO suggests the windows are inspected to determine if they are in working order. Clean or replace window screens.

GSCF Administration has submitted a Capital Construction request for new windows. Most of the window are beyond routine maintenance repair and need to be replaced.

- Retiling, repair and deep cleaning of shower stalls.

Maintenance and Infrastructure Improvement is a very high priority for GSCF Administration. Cell sanitation is a daily occurrence and unit repairs are being planned systematically.

- The OCO recommends increasing the regular scheduling of an exterminator to help reduce the presence of insects and rodents on the unit.

The exterminator is already scheduled twice a week. GSCF is a large institution and the current exterminator does a great job to adequately cover all the areas of the Institution.

- Replace mattresses and pillows that are in poor condition with better quality ones.

GSCF Administration will verify the last time mattress and pillow exchange occurred and ensure this is being done according to established policy and procedure.

- The OCO recommends established protocols to afford the population the opportunity to individually deliver their correspondence.

The installation of more boxes on the unit will be explored or separate movement to already designated boxes.

- The addition of shelving for the institutional forms placed in a high traffic area to allow anonymity.

The shelving for forms is an excellent idea which is being discussed with our wood/carpentry shop.

- Offer an additional period for the housing unit to access the JPay kiosks and telephones during morning hours.

Additional time will be given once the passive recreation schedule is adjusted. This is currently being worked on by the Major's Office.

- The OCO recommends the inclusion of a morning indoor recreation period to allow for increased out of cell time.
- The OCO promotes the implementation of an additional evening active recreation period and the incorporation of an alternative indoor space.

Additional time will be given once the passive recreation schedule is adjusted. This is currently being worked on by the Major's Office to include Night Yard/Recreation.

- The OCO took notice of many leaks from the ceiling throughout the institution including educational areas, hallways, and the housing unit.

GSCF Administration has submitted several Capital Construction requests for roofing repairs. The numerous leaks throughout the institution are attributed to roofing issues.

- The implementation of a different container for meals to promote a cleaner and sanitary food distribution.

The Food Service Supervisor has been met with and the plan is for inmates to be served on trays that will be cleaned and sanitized by the Food Service department.

- Mechanism to keep food and beverages cold.

Unit refrigeration devices are being explored.

- Ensure all food handlers are wearing the appropriate safety gear to include hairnets and/or caps.

All Food Service workers and those that supervise them will be reminded to ensure they are donning the appropriate safety gear when handling food.