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## Prison Oversight Office Recaps Five Years of Findings

Report marks major milestones in corrections and points to ten problems lawmakers can help solve

**Trenton, New Jersey** – Today, the New Jersey Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson published its Fiscal Year 2026 Annual Report, looking back on nearly five years of prison inspections and complaint investigations under the leadership of Ombudsperson Terry Schuster.

The Office is an independent state agency providing oversight of prison operations and conditions. Lawmakers expanded the Office's mandate as well as its access to facilities, people, and records in 2020 under [the Dignity Act](#), and Schuster was appointed by former Governor Phil Murphy in 2022.

The new report describes the last five years, in which the Office received and addressed more than 60,000 requests for help from incarcerated people and their loved ones. During that time, the Office expanded and Ombudsperson staff are now more visible to people in prison and the public. Staff are now on-site in every state prison several days each week. The Office has hosted 32 town halls in communities across the state. Since Schuster's appointment, the Office has published 15 detailed reports making observations and recommendations related to living conditions, out-of-cell time, extreme temperatures, deaths in custody, access to phone calls, prison medical clinics, and many other topics.

The report describes the most common complaint areas this past year related to personal property, housing, health care, communication with the outside world, and conditions of confinement. It notes fewer complaints in the last year from Edna Mahan Correctional Facility, and fewer complaints from all facilities related to safety and health care.

The report also describes policy and practice changes that stemmed from the Office's recommendations like shortened sanctions that cut a person off from contact visits with family members, expanded wound care training for prison nurses, and the launch of a new paralegal training program.

The report applauds Governor Sherrill's reappointment of Department of Corrections Commissioner Victoria Kuhn and celebrates the successful conclusion of court oversight put in place to address and prevent sexual abuse at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility.

It describes other milestones and achievements this year in corrections, including introducing tablets that have vastly expanded access for incarcerated people to call loved ones, coordinating efforts to deter contraband that appear to be decreasing illicit drug use, building a large and growing network of community reentry partners, and establishing a new Board of Trustees to increase transparency and civilian oversight of the men's prisons.

The report then lays out ten challenging issues that New Jersey policymakers should grapple with, offering observations and guidance on how each problem could be addressed. The concerns include the following:

1. Prisons can't operate properly when they are understaffed.
2. People are housed two-to-a-cell in spaces designed for only one person.
3. People in close custody housing units continue to report little out-of-cell time.
4. New Jersey's prison population is getting older.
5. Several young people have died unnatural deaths in custody this year.
6. The State still houses people in a nearly 200-year-old antiquated prison.
7. Several regulations that help ensure county jail cells are habitable do not apply to state prisons.
8. Thousands of people are held in prison cells without air conditioning in extreme summer heat.
9. People detained indefinitely for sex offender treatment are not in a treatment setting.
10. County jails have problems similar to those in prisons but have no independent oversight.

Laying out these issues as a policy agenda for state lawmakers and the Department of Corrections, the Office describes its relevant findings and proposes initial steps to address each area of concern.

This report and the Office's previous report are published on the Office's website:  
[www.nj.gov/correctionsombudsperson](http://www.nj.gov/correctionsombudsperson).

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