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Ombudsperson Publishes Inspection Report for Bayside State Prison

Population is safe and active, but sleep and eat two-to-a-cell in rooms designed for one person

Trenton, New Jersey – Today, the New Jersey Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson (the Office) published observations and findings from inspections of Bayside State Prison in Leesburg, New Jersey. The Office conducted inspections of the prison's general population housing units in June and October 2025 and January 2026.

Bayside is a 55-year-old prison initially designed for 500 people that now holds nearly 1,300. The report includes side-by-side photographs of the prison's housing units, cells, and dining hall from 1972 just after the prison opened and from 2025 when the Office conducted its inspection. As seen in the photos, cells initially designed for single-occupancy are double-bunked today, leaving less than 20 square feet of floor space per person. People now eat all their meals in those cells rather than in the dining hall, a space that is now used for records storage.

The facility received high marks for keeping the population active and engaged in exercise, work, school, and programming. The population has outdoor recreation every day and indoor recreation every other day. People are offered education, career readiness, religious services, rehabilitative programming, a variety of employment opportunities, and access to a reading library and law library.

In a survey of the incarcerated population conducted by the Office, people reported feeling safe and most reported never witnessing fights or drug use.

Bayside has heat in the winter, but no air conditioning in the summer. The housing units have large floor to ceiling windows facing an interior courtyard, which provide lots of natural light, but exacerbate heat in the summer. Indoor temperatures during the Office's June 2025 inspection, for example, ranged from 84° to 94° Fahrenheit. The Office found compliance with Department of Corrections directives for

mitigating summer heat, but also found ice machines struggling to keep up with demand on the hottest days.

The Office ended its report with recommendations related to emergency response tools, housing unit record-keeping, space for eating meals, and cleanliness of showers and kitchen equipment.

The New Jersey Department of Corrections (the Department) made responsive improvements between the Ombudsperson Office's October and January inspections related to mattresses, kitchen safety equipment, and shower curtains and exhaust fans. The Department has also released a public response to the report, available on both the Department's website and the Office's website.

The New Jersey Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson is an independent state agency that provides oversight of prison operations and conditions. Headed by Ombudsperson Terry Schuster, the Office inspects facilities and investigates complaints of mistreatment.

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