



2022 Annual Report

Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson
Independent Prison Oversight for the State of New Jersey

MISSION AND MANDATE

The Corrections Ombudsperson provides independent oversight to protect the safety, health, and well-being of incarcerated people. The office works to identify and address problems at the individual and system levels to ensure that people housed in New Jersey's prisons are safe, have their health needs addressed, have reasonable access to their loved ones, and are engaged in productive activities to prepare them to return to the community.

In the Dignity Act, signed into law in 2020 by Governor Phil Murphy, state lawmakers:

- Authorize the [appointment](#) of an Ombudsperson to work with [state prisoners](#),
- Outline the office's [duties](#),
- Give the office discretion to [investigate complaints](#),
- Direct the office to [inspect prison facilities](#) and operations,
- Provide [broad access](#) to facilities, people, and records,
- Protect [confidential communications](#) and [prohibit retaliation](#) for working with the office, and
- Create an [advisory board](#) to support and guide the office.

MESSAGE FROM THE OMBUDSPERSON

I believe the goal for corrections should always be for people to come out of prison better than they went in, and that prison oversight allows the public to hold the government to that ideal.

“Ombudsperson” means representative of the people. We work for you. We hope our office will be visible and accessible to the people held in our state prisons, that we can be neutral and reliable fact-finders for the public about conditions on the inside, and that the Department of Corrections will always see us as valuable collaborative problem-solvers.

We want a healthy well-functioning prison system that builds pride among staff about the impact they have on those in their custody, hope among incarcerated people about their futures, and confidence among the public that those coming home from prison are better prepared to be good neighbors.

We promise to listen compassionately to all sides, to be unbiased and curious, and when we don’t understand something, to look at it more closely. We promise to gather data and opinions, and to give those living and working in our prisons a seat at the table to solve the problems that surface through our monitoring. We will lead with facts, tell the truth as well as we understand it, give credit where credit is due, and also routinely turn our attention inward, evaluating our office’s impact and effectiveness.

Please reach out if you have tips, complaints, input, and ideas. We welcome your feedback and want to continue finding ways to better serve the public. Here are some ways to reach us:

- Incarcerated person hotline: 555-555-5555
- Halfway house hotline: 800-305-1811
- Family hotline: 888-909-3244
- Main office: 609-633-2596
- Email: info@oco.nj.gov
- Mail: P.O. Box 855, Trenton, NJ 08625
- Web: www.nj.gov/correctionsombudsperson/

If you’re interested in receiving our reports as soon as they are published, you can join our listserv [here](#).

Thank you,

Terry Schuster
New Jersey Corrections Ombudsperson



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Look Back

The Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson received roughly 1,000 requests for help each month during the last year. Incarcerated people and their loved ones most commonly reached out for assistance with issues related to housing, property, and health care services in prison. Those contacts and others are categorized and summarized in more detail in the body of this report. The highest volume of calls came from the state's largest facility, South Woods State Prison, and the highest number of calls per person came from the state's only women's prison, Edna Mahan Correctional Facility. The Office was able to help resolve concerns or provide needed information in response to roughly 6 out of every 10 contacts to the office and referred nearly 3 in 10 to other entities.

The powers of the Office were expanded by the Dignity Act, which was signed into law by Governor Phil Murphy in January 2020. On May 5th of this year, Governor Murphy appointed Terry Schuster to lead the Office for a 5-year term, and in July, the Governor and lawmakers increased the office's funding to just over \$2 million.

A Look Ahead

In the coming year, the Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson aims to launch systemic monitoring to answer four key questions of public concern:

- Are incarcerated people safe?
- Are their health needs being addressed?
- Are they engaged in purposeful activity?
- Do they have meaningful access to loved ones?

The Office will gather data, survey and interview incarcerated people and staff, inspect prison facilities, and work collaboratively with the Department of Corrections and impacted stakeholders on policy recommendations to address issues that surface.

To better respond to individual requests for help, the Office aims to build capacity for investigations, hire medical experts and other staff, modernize its call center, and refine internal policies and training.

The Office plans to increase its on-site presence and visibility in the prisons, seek out people with limited English proficiency and other communication barriers using interpretation services, hold public meetings and listening sessions across the state, engage more with lawmakers, and establish increased independence from the Department of Corrections by migrating records, IT, and office space.

BUDGET AND OPERATIONS

To implement the Dignity Act, the Governor and lawmakers appropriated funds for up to 15 full-time positions in the Ombudsperson office in Fiscal Year 2022 and up to 21 positions in 2023. The office's FY23 budget is \$2,065,000, ninety-five percent of which is for projected staff salaries. Currently, 11 staff positions are filled, including the Corrections Ombudsperson, Terry Schuster, who was appointed by the Governor on May 5th of this year following a national candidate search and who started work on May 23rd. A top priority for the remainder of the calendar year is hiring additional staff.

Between March of 2021 and April of 2022, the office conducted facility inspections at each of the 11 state prisons. Two facilities—Southern State Correctional Facility and William H. Fauver Correctional Facility—have since been closed. Reports and photographs from those inspections are posted publicly [here](#). On September 6th, the office published its first thematic report on systemic issues in the state prison system, a [special report](#) on summer heat in the facilities.

Assistant Ombudspersons now spend 2-3 days each week on site at state prison facilities observing conditions and responding to questions and calls for help from incarcerated people. They spend the remainder of the week with support staff at the Ombudsperson central office answering letters and fielding hotline calls from incarcerated people and their loved ones. The office receives about 50 contacts each business day, or 1,000 contacts per month.

ADVISORY BOARD

The Ombudsperson office's citizen Advisory Board includes:

- Three members appointed by Speaker Coughlin: Ron Pierce, Gale Muhammad, and Amos Caley.
- Two members appointed by former Senate President Sweeney: Kathy White and Rob Baran. An additional seat, formerly held by Patricia Teffenhart, is vacant pending a new appointment by Senate President Scutari.
- Two members appointed by Governor Murphy: Caroyln Chang and Ed Neafsey. An additional seat, formerly held by Tess Borden, is vacant pending a new appointment by the Governor.

The Advisory Board met routinely with the Governor's office and staff at the Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson, helped the staff take significant steps toward implementing the Dignity Act, and assisted in the selection of the Corrections Ombudsperson. Since Schuster's appointment, the board members have each met with the Ombudsperson individually, have participated in a day-long strategic planning meeting, and have reviewed and contributed to this Annual Report.

REQUESTS FOR HELP IN THE PAST YEAR

In the 12 months preceding the preparation of this Annual Report, the Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson received 12,411 individual requests for help from incarcerated people and their loved ones. 71% of the contacts were from incarcerated people themselves, 26% from their loved ones, and 3% from attorneys, facility staff, or others.

More than half (58%) of the contacts came from the three largest prison facilities: South Woods State Prison in Bridgeton, Northern State Prison in Newark, and New Jersey State Prison in Trenton. (See Figure 1.) The number of contacts to the Ombudsperson office from each facility was generally less than the number of people housed there with the exception of Edna Mahan Correctional Facility, for which the number of contacts to the office was nearly triple the average daily population. Just over half (52%) of people reached out to the Ombudsperson office by phone, more than a third (39%) reached the office in writing, and the remainder contacted the office in person when Assistant Ombudspersons were on-site in the facilities.

One in every 10 contacts came from just 20 individuals (and their loved ones and advocates) who made repeated outreach to the office. Three of these individuals accounted for more than 100 contacts each in the last year. High-volume utilizers of Ombudsperson services were most commonly requesting help with health care issues. Some people contacted the office multiple times related to legal issues, safety concerns, or missing property, and many voiced different concerns with each call or letter.

The average number of contacts per month was 1,034, remaining fairly steady throughout the last year, but peaking between January and March of 2022, when an increased number of people reached out to the Ombudsperson office for help understanding the Public Health Emergency Credit release process. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 1. Requests for assistance by facility

Sept. 1, 2021 – Aug. 31, 2022

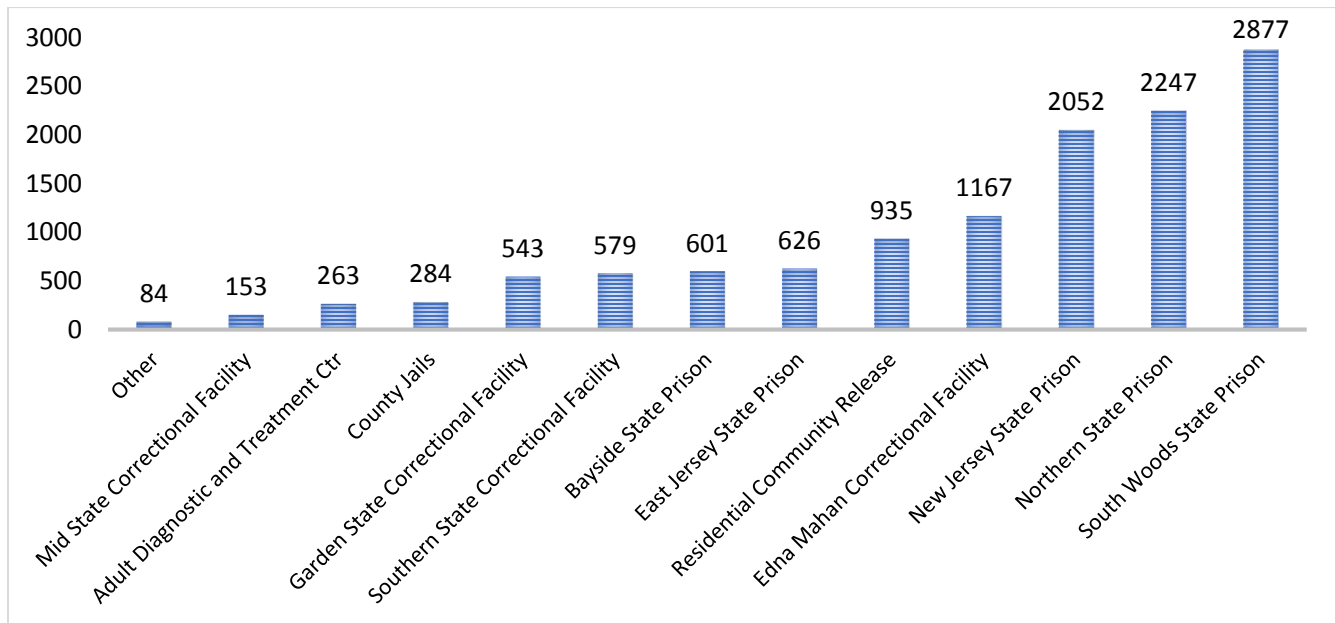
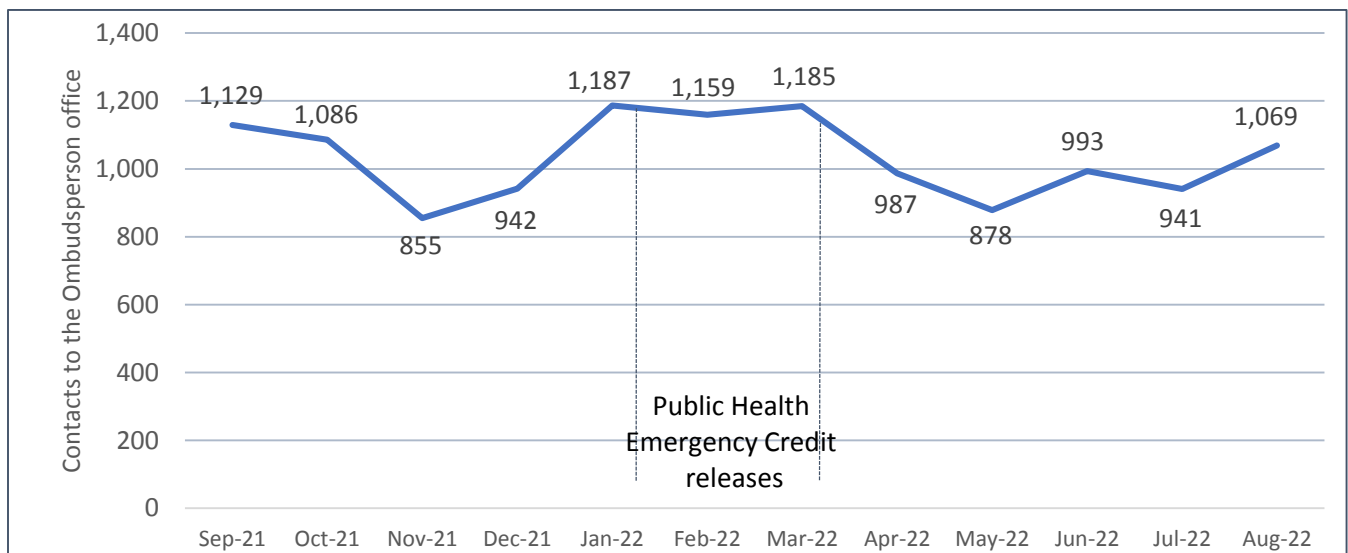


Figure 2. Requests for Ombudsperson assistance by month

Sept. 1, 2021 – Aug. 31, 2022, showing announcement and end date of Public Health Emergency Credit releases



Several hundred people contacted the Ombudsperson office between January and March of 2022, asking for clarity about their release eligibility during the period of Public Health Emergency Credit releases. This contributed to a slight peak in overall call volume.

Requests for help fell into 10 categories, listed below in descending order based on volume of contacts. Items in these categories represent allegations, not substantiated findings.

Classification and housing.

Calls related to facility housing assignments, transfers, custody status (minimum, medium, or maximum security housing), cellmates, and release dates. Common examples include concerns about how a person's maximum sentence expiration date was calculated, not getting credit for days spent awaiting a sentence in jail, questions about eligibility for Public Health Emergency Credits, lack of response to facility transfer requests for programming opportunities, objections to placement in a particular type of housing (temporary investigative holds, two-person cell rather than one-person cell, housing units with increased restrictions on movement, etc.), and issues with physical space accommodations for people with disabilities.

Property and money.

Requests for assistance with missing or damaged property, payments for work, and refunds for undelivered commissary items. Common examples include calls for help locating lost or stolen property or appealing a claim for reimbursement that has been denied, allegations that property was incorrectly confiscated, and complaints that clothing provided is too large or small, that wages were improperly garnished, or that money or property was not transferred when a person was moved to a different prison facility.

Health and mental health care.

Concerns about medical and mental health services, and assistive devices for people with disabilities. Common examples include issues with medication being ordered late or in insufficient quantity, slow or no response to sick calls and requests for initial or follow-up care, access to specialists, COVID testing and treatment, family members' concerns about the adequacy of health care services provided to their loved ones, and reports of being denied a wheelchair or an assistive device for hearing or vision impairments.

Outside communications.

Requests for assistance with family visitation, mail, phone, and electronic communications. Common examples include concerns about denial of contact visits, limited space for non-contact visits, and discomfort related to outdoor visits in cold weather, complaints about missing and undelivered mail, long wait times for package requests to be approved, alleged interference with confidential legal mail, and reports of IT problems with telephones and JPay tablets or kiosks (devices that offer electronic means of communicating with family or with facility leaders through the grievance system).

Records and legal access.

Contacts related to an incarcerated person's medical, criminal, or tax records, court filings and hearings, access to legal assistance or proceedings, and requests for public information. Common examples include concerns about getting access to a lawyer or paralegal, lack of information about an upcoming or missed court hearing, or slow or no response to requests for public or personal records, requests for assistance correcting errors in a person's criminal record, securing copies of their medical records, or replacing a COVID vaccination card that is needed for employment and visitation privileges.

Safety and violence.

Allegations of physical or sexual abuse, harassment, retaliation, and safety concerns. Examples include alleged assaults, threats, or harassment from staff or other incarcerated people, slow or no follow-up after requests for placement in protective custody or claims of assault, inappropriate touching during a pat-down search, denial of a housing reassignment after reporting aggression from a cellmate, being housed in the same unit with another person who has been ordered to “keep separate,” anonymous tips about incarcerated people stealing property or food or selling contraband, and claims of false disciplinary charges being imposed in retaliation for individuals voicing concerns to staff.

Conditions of confinement.

Complaints related to COVID protocols, sanitation, temperatures, food, and bedding. Common examples include reports that COVID quarantine procedures and timelines are not being followed or seem excessive, that water temperatures in showers are extremely hot, complaints of mold, insects, rodents, lack of air conditioning or ventilation, inability to access cleaning supplies, and issues with food delivery to a housing unit or cell.

Discipline and behavior management.

Calls related to sanctions and penalties imposed for rule violations. Common examples include a person not knowing or understanding the sanction that has been imposed, allegations that a particular punishment was not allowed under policy, complaints about phone privileges being suspended as a sanction, reports of long wait times in pre-hearing disciplinary housing before a due process hearing is held, or hearings being held without the person being present, and allegations that good time credits are not being restored after periods of good behavior.

Programming and work.

Concerns about education, work assignments, treatment programs, religious services, and recreation. Common examples include complaints from individuals being denied or waiting long times to be enrolled in GED, college classes, or other programming, people having difficulty getting a job assignment, losing their job because of a housing transfer, or not having an injury-based work restriction honored by their employer, allegations that recreation time is being denied or cut short, and concerns about lack of access to clergy and religious items. Many of these issues relate to divisions other than the DOC’s Division of Programs and Community Services.

Parole.

Concerns about parole eligibility dates, barriers to parole release, timing of parole hearings, and parole violations resulting in returns to prison. Common examples include claims that a person’s parole eligibility date has been miscalculated, that a release hold was incorrectly placed on a person who had been approved for release, that a person’s parole hearing has been delayed by slow or untimely preparation of a pre-parole packet, and claims of a wrongful violation of parole resulting in the person’s return to prison.

More than 2,800 requests for assistance—about a quarter of the contacts between Sept. 1st 2021 and Aug. 31st 2022—related to incarcerated people’s housing and security classification. The Ombudsperson office received more than 2,000 contacts related to personal property and money, and more than 1,700 contacts related to health and mental health care. (See Figure 3.)

These trends varied by facility. Housing and classification issues were the most common reasons people contacted the Ombudsperson office in 5 of the 10 facilities as well as the residential community release programs. In four facilities, concerns about outside communications were the second-most common category of contacts. Health care was the most common reason people at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility and East Jersey State Prison contacted the Ombudsperson office. Compared to other facilities, safety issues made up a larger portion of contacts at Edna Mahan, the state’s only women’s prison, and Garden State Correctional Facility, where young adults are housed. At the Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center, which holds people convicted of sex offenses, the top reason for contacting the office was concerns about records and legal access. (See Figure 4.)

The Dignity Act gives the Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson discretion to allocate limited resources, triage calls to prioritize those most in need of intervention or investigation from an independent oversight body, provide information and technical assistance to help incarcerated people advocate for themselves, and make referrals to other entities more directly responsible or capable of assisting the individual. Accordingly, nearly half (45%) of the office’s contacts were addressed by offering information or technical assistance. The office took additional measures to assist and help resolve 13% of concerns, and assisted but were unable to resolve 3%. In an additional 1% of cases, the office is assisting and currently awaiting resolution. An additional 29% of calls to the office were referred to other entities and 9% involved no alleged policy violation or otherwise required no action by the office.

Figure 3. Requests for help by subject matter

Sept. 1, 2021 – Aug. 31, 2022

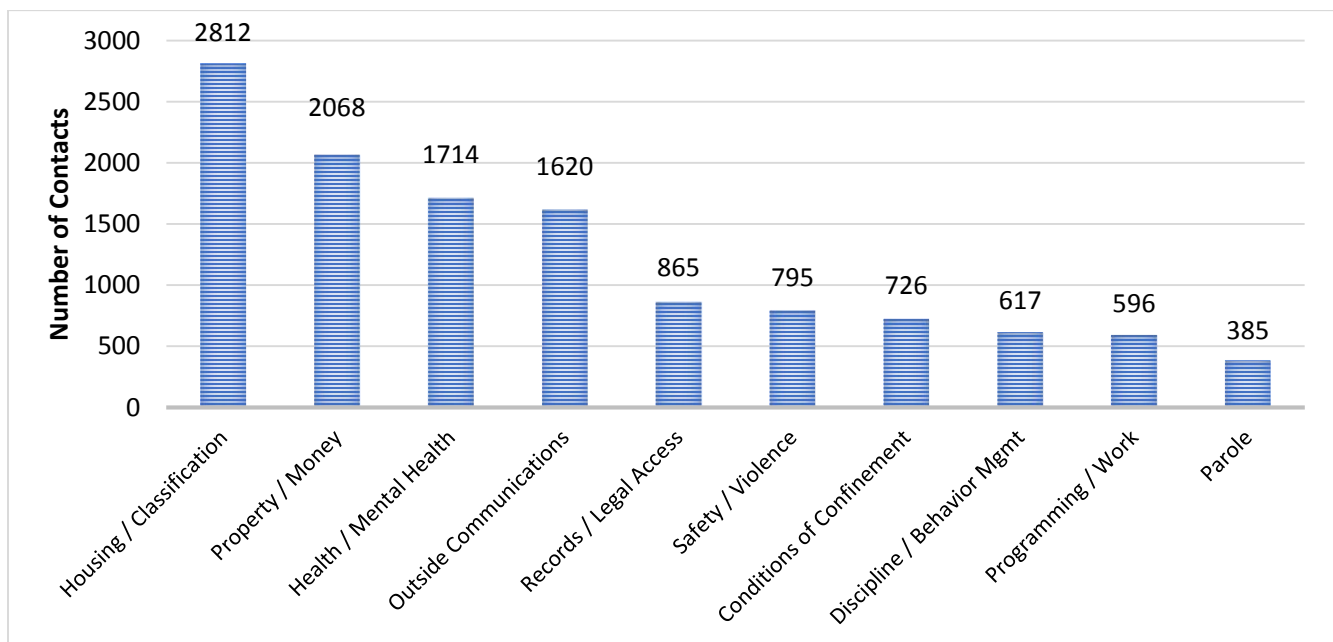
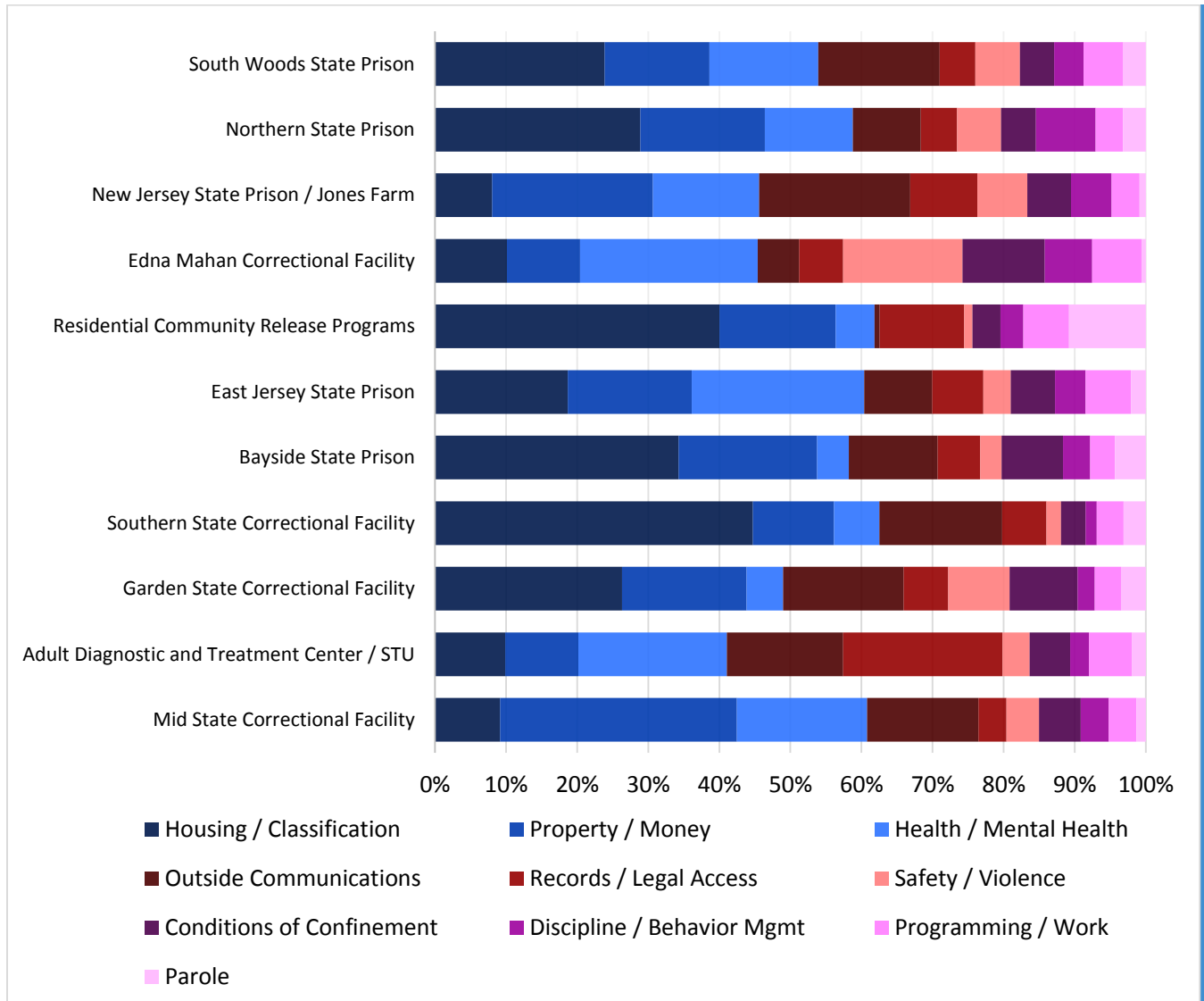


Figure 4. Request for help categories, by facility

Sept. 1, 2021 – Aug. 31, 2022



STRATEGIC PLAN FOR INDEPENDENT PRISON OVERSIGHT

Independent oversight brings attention and transparency to chronic problems that arise in institutional settings that are otherwise closed off to the public. It allows community members to hold the government accountable for protecting those in their custody from harm. It also helps those running secure facilities contend with and improve their own practices.

The following vision for implementing the Dignity Act has been shaped by the Ombudsperson with input from the office's staff and advisory board, advocates for reform, community members, leaders of the state prison system, and other government officials.

I. Monitoring key priorities across the prison system

One significant change to the role of the Corrections Ombudsperson is a new mandate to conduct systemic monitoring of prison conditions and operations. The Dignity Act empowers the office to collect data, review records, conduct surveys and interviews, and make announced and unannounced site visits, granting the office expanded access to facilities, people, and information in order to make public findings and policy recommendations.

As concerns or problems surface that seem worthy of closer examination, the Ombudsperson office hopes to work closely with facility and Department leaders to understand how things work on the ground and why, and to draw on their expertise to develop recommendations for change at the policy level. The office is also committed to involving advocates, community members, expert consultants, and especially incarcerated people as problem-solving partners and advisors.

By the end of 2023, the Ombudsperson office aims to answer four key questions of public concern for those incarcerated in New Jersey state prisons, detailed on the next page.

The goal of this systemic monitoring is to measure, applaud, support, and improve the Department's practices and outcomes in these four key areas of public concern. These will be the primary focus of facility inspections conducted by the Ombudsperson office. The office also intends to reserve resources and capacity to inspect and report on additional systemic issues that emerge as priorities in the coming year.

Are people safe?

The office aims to gather data and information on fights, injuries, and applications of force, • Assess the Department of Corrections' internal investigations into allegations of abuse, • Interview incarcerated people and staff at each facility about whether they feel safe, respected, and treated with dignity, parts of the prison that feel less or more safe, and what sorts of changes would make them feel safer, • Examine the effectiveness of sanctions and incentives used to manage behavior in the facilities, and • Evaluate the extent of support and recognition given to staff and incarcerated people for de-escalating tense situations.

Are their health needs being addressed?

The office aims to hire and/or contract with health care professionals to help monitor compliance with standards of care, • Survey and interview incarcerated people about treatment and services provided for injuries, acute and chronic illnesses, mental health disorders, and disabilities, and any barriers to accessing needed care, and • Engage medical and nursing staff in identifying needed resources.

Are they engaged in purposeful activity?

The office aims to gather data to measure what portion of each day incarcerated people are engaged in programming, education, work assignments, and recreation, • Survey and interview incarcerated people and staff about the value of those activities for reintegration into the community and workforce, • Examine barriers that prevent more purposeful activity, and • Monitor compliance with the Isolated Confinement Restriction Act.

Do they have meaningful access to loved ones?

The office aims to observe family visitation and interview incarcerated people and their loved ones about their experiences with mail, phone calls, and visits, • Examine policies and practices with special attention to any that restrict phone calls and visitation for public health or disciplinary reasons, • Assess the processes people must navigate to get information about their incarcerated loved ones, and • Monitor compliance with the Dignity Act's provisions related to incarcerated primary care givers.

II. Addressing individual requests for help

The bulk of the Ombudsperson office resources in the last year have been concentrated and invested in helping individual incarcerated people and their loved ones who contact the office requesting assistance. Assistant Ombudspersons John Blakeslee (now retired) and Melissa Matthews deserve immense praise for their extraordinary efforts to increase the office's capacity, responsiveness, and visibility following the departure of the last Ombudsperson. Their leadership and industriousness have gone a great distance to build confidence and trust in our office among incarcerated people and have paid dividends in our heightened awareness of what's happening behind the walls.

Investigations.

The Ombudsperson office is committed to investigating concerning allegations and trends related to the safety, health, and well-being of incarcerated people, as envisioned in the Dignity Act. The office aims to build capacity to carry out these responsibilities, develop internal policies clarifying when and how the office will exercise investigatory powers, work with the Department of Corrections to operationalize those policies, and create a staffing plan and training for investigators within the office.

Medical expertise.

The Ombudsperson office fields thousands of concerns each year from incarcerated people and their families regarding health care provided in prison. The office is not authorized to offer a second medical opinion, but to be of assistance, must be qualified to help people navigate their health care options and ensure access to needed services, understanding generally accepted standards of care. In the next year, the office aims to hire at least one Assistant Ombudsperson for Correctional Health Care to be an in-house subject matter expert and contact for patients who request assistance related to the medical and mental health care they are provided in custody. Our goal is to offer more direct assistance rather than referring all health care concerns to other entities. This role would be separate from the resources invested in the office's systemic monitoring of health care services.

Follow-through on referrals.

All allegations of abuse and neglect must be reported to SID, the front-line investigative body for all incidents occurring in Department facilities. Among the policies the Ombudsperson office will develop in the coming year is an internal protocol and timeline for follow-up on abuse and neglect allegations referred to SID.

Internal performance monitoring.

The public wants assurance that the Ombudsperson office is not merely getting letters and responding to them, but is handling them well, resolving problems when possible, and adding value to the state's corrections system. By the end of 2023, the Ombudsperson office aims to be better positioned to report measurable performance outcomes. The office plans to hire a Deputy Ombudsperson and an

Executive Assistant to the Ombudsperson to develop and refine the office's policies and training for responding to individual calls for help, provide more extensive supervision and support to Assistant Ombudspersons, and create internal systems for data analysis, customer feedback, and continuous quality improvement.

Feedback on the Department's grievance system.

At times, incarcerated people contact the Ombudsperson office because they are not getting sufficient assistance through the Department's internal remedy system. When the remedy system in facilities breaks down, the call volume to the Ombudsperson office can become unwieldy with items that should instead be handled by facility staff. The Ombudsperson office is not the Department of Corrections grievance system—it exists as independent oversight of the prison system. In the coming year, Assistant Ombudspersons will routinely provide feedback to facility and Department leadership on ways to improve local grievance responses.

III. Enhancing on-site presence and visibility at prison facilities

The sharpest critique of the Ombudsperson office in the past was how seldom it was present on-site at the prison facilities. Not regularly being in the places where people were held in custody reduced the office's credibility in the eyes of incarcerated people and the public, curbed its access to information about conditions of confinement, and contributed to an environment in which abuse and victimization went unchecked. With increased state funding, the office has grown in size, and six Assistant Ombudspersons now spend 2-3 days each week on-site in the facilities.

Regular active presence in all state prisons.

In the coming year, the office intends to hire additional staff, increase our presence and responsiveness in facilities, and refine our protocols for in-person follow up to requests for assistance, aiming to rebuild trust with incarcerated people and other stakeholders. Our staff will hold recurring meetings with facility administrators, participate in policy workgroups to solve problems unique to each institution, and routinely monitor living conditions in all housing units.

Finding people who may have trouble reaching us.

Even with increased capacity and on-site presence, the Ombudsperson office may still be inaccessible to some people in New Jersey's prisons because of language barriers, hearing and vision impairments, low literacy, developmental disabilities, or psychiatric disorders. In the coming year, the Ombudsperson office aims to identify those populations, make in-person contact with each of them utilizing interpretation services and other accommodations when needed, and develop mechanisms and protocols to ensure they have meaningful ongoing access to our office.

IV. Engaging the public

The Corrections Ombudsperson office exists to serve as the eyes and ears of the citizenry in a prison system that is otherwise inaccessible to the general public. The Dignity Act requires the Ombudsperson to hold public meetings at least quarterly to gather input into the office's activities. The office held public meetings via Zoom in the first and second quarters of 2022 and paused in the third quarter as the newly appointed Corrections Ombudsperson came into office and began a statewide listening tour. The next public meeting is scheduled for November 4th, 2022.

Community members.

The Ombudsperson office aims to hire a Deputy Ombudsperson for external affairs. In collaboration with the office's Advisory Board, it will hold regular in-person public meetings and listening sessions in all regions of the state, invite advocates and people across the state with lived experience to participate in the office's policy workgroups, engage with prison reform coalitions, and launch a Council of Families with Incarcerated Loved Ones to advise and collaborate on the office's work. The Ombudsperson office will build a listserv for members of the public, media, and government interested in receiving its facility inspection reports and thematic reports, and engage the public with data, findings, and news coverage on the office's website and social media platforms.

State lawmakers.

The office also aims to increase its engagement with lawmakers in the coming year, tracking relevant bills and resolutions and offering input and testimony when invited. It will invest time educating the public and lawmakers about the office's findings and recommendations for changes to policy, law, and state appropriations, and share observations about the implementation of laws previously enacted. To the extent that existing or future commissions and taskforces would find it helpful, the Ombudsperson will attend, participate in, and offer data and input into conversations about criminal justice, corrections, and reentry policy across the state.

V. Personnel and equipment

The Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson is operating with insufficient staff on outdated equipment, utilizing IT services, email, office space, and records storage provided by the Department of Corrections without adequate protection to ensure confidentiality and independence.

Staffing.

The Ombudsperson office was funded for 21 full time positions in the FY23 budget. This gives the Office the opportunity to hire ten additional staff members and this office has made it a top priority to fill those positions by February of 2023. To support the expanded powers and mandate of the office, the staffing plan includes additional Assistant Ombudspersons and support staff; Deputies for systemic monitoring and individual-level assistance; an Executive Assistant for policy development and quality improvement; and positions with expertise in data analysis, public relations, and health care. Because the office's investigative authority overlaps with the Attorney General's and with the DOC Special Investigations Division (SID), more steps are needed to operationalize the office's investigations, and appropriate staffing and training will be proposed for the FY24 budget.

Modernizing the call center.

When incarcerated people call the Ombudsperson hotline, a staff person must be physically present in the office to answer. People in state prisons routinely complain that the line is busy when they call, and their primary alternative to calling is hand-writing a letter to our office. The office's computers and database are outdated and fragile and processes for contacting people through legal mail are slow. To become more accessible to the incarcerated population, the office in the coming year will update our call center technology enabling calls to be answered and forwarded remotely. The office will also explore options for the incarcerated population to leave voicemails or reach our office through other means like a confidential email system. The office will secure new computers that allow for on-site and remote work and create a new database for intake, follow up with individuals calling our office, and data analysis.

Independence from the Department of Corrections.

The Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson has historically been a small team trying to do a large job with insufficient personnel and equipment. The office has benefited from workspace and technology provided by the Department of Corrections. The Ombudsperson office, however, cannot hold itself out to the public as an independent prison oversight entity when its email system and computer files are supported and accessible by the Department of Corrections' IT office, when its paper records are stored on-site in Department of Corrections buildings, and when its offices and conference rooms are sited on the Department's central office campus. In the coming year, the Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson will work to obtain independent off-site office space and records storage, and migrate its electronic files, email, and IT support out of the Department of Corrections.

CONTACTING THE OMBUDSPERSON OFFICE

Being available to incarcerated people and members of the public is of the utmost importance to this office. People in state prisons can contact us in writing with a letter or a Request for Assistance form in [English](#) or [Spanish](#). All mail to the Ombudsperson office is confidential and protected in the same manner as legal correspondence. Letters and forms may be placed in the Ombudsperson mailboxes on the housing units in state prison facilities or mailed to:

Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson
P.O. Box 855
Trenton, NJ 08625

Other ways to reach the office include the following:

Incarcerated person hotline: 555-555-5555 from any phone in the state prison system

Halfway house hotline: 800-305-1811

Family hotline: 888-909-3244

Main office: 609-633-2596

Email: info@oco.nj.gov

Web: www.nj.gov/correctionsombudsperson/

People interested in receiving the office's reports as soon as they are published can join our listserv [here](#).