



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
**DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS**  
P.O. Box 41100 • Olympia, Washington 98504-1110

December 7, 2020

Joanna Carns  
Office of Corrections Ombuds  
2700 Evergreen Parkway NW  
Olympia, WA 98505

Dear Ms. Carns:

The Washington Department of Corrections appreciates the opportunity to respond to the OCO Report on the 'investigation into the recent death of a person incarcerated at Airway Heights Corrections Center' completed by the Office of Corrections Ombuds.

Upon the unfortunate death of the person incarcerated at Airway Heights Corrections Center, the department launched both an internal and external set of investigations to review the death and determine any systems needing improvement. The scope of the investigation also included culpability of the department in the individual's death. The finding of the [external investigation](#) was that the department properly followed all procedures in place to protect the incarcerated population. The recommendations set forth by the OCO will further enhance the department's procedures to protect the incarcerated population.

After the internal review of this incident, the Assistant Secretary for Prisons in partnership with the Assistant Secretary for Reentry, updated the existing DOC Form 17-087 Separation/Prohibition Additional/Removal Questionnaire with two additional questions:

- Does the individual know any individual(s) currently incarcerated with the department who:
  - Would be a safety/security risk to their self or others? Yes No
  - Committed a crime against them or their friend/family member/significant other? Yes No

Adding these two questions should give classification more definitive information (if answered honestly) when decided facility housing assignments.

Per the agency's [health services webpage](#), over the most recent five calendar years, the Washington Department of Corrections has experienced two homicides of those housed within its correctional facilities. Per the agency's [data analytics webpage](#), the [average daily population](#) (ADP) for the state's correctional facilities is 16,000 individuals. The Department takes very seriously the health and welfare of each individual committed to its custody. The information provided by the OCO was useful to ensure the Department of Corrections is doing everything it can to ensure an incarcerated person's time in the agency's correctional facilities is a fair and safe space for all incarcerated individuals.



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<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Response</b>
Develop and implement a waiver form, which will be automatically triggered should staff become aware that cellmates have a pre-existing relationship prior to assignment of the same cell. If utilized, this low-tech form will enable DOC staff to proactively document that the incarcerated individuals do not believe that they are in danger with their assigned cellmate. This form will not supersede existing protocols and procedures which trigger investigations and segregated placements. Corrections already utilizes similar forms, such as the attached Personal Security Needs Assessment Waiver, which AHCC staff provided to OCO as an example of an existing protocol and waiver.	The department is currently analyzing <i>DOC Policy 420.120 Cell/Room Assignment</i> and determining a subsequent process for utilizing such a form or other practices in alignment with this recommendation.
In order to augment existing classification counselor review processes, when the next file management system upgrade is made, prioritize obtaining the capability to electronically cross reference uploaded documents to mine for overlaps in multiple incarcerated individuals' files.	The department agrees to document this functionality as a potential feature for a new correctional file management system as it looks to modernize or replace the current offender management system.

We also appreciate your team's understanding of the unique processes across facilities and the addition of policies and procedures being put in place to address them. We are working towards proactivity and improving quality assurance processes throughout the department. Moving forward, Washington Department of Corrections will continue to collaborate with the Office of the Corrections Ombuds to implement additional policies, procedures, and security measures to continue to improve the facility operations.

Sincerely,

Steve Sinclair, Secretary  
Washington Department of Corrections