



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
P.O. Box 41101 • Olympia, Washington 98504-1101

June 8, 2021

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 May 6, 2021, Office of Corrections Ombuds (OCO) report on the “ investigation into multiple individuals held for an extended period of time in administrative segregation.”

Recommendation	Response
DOC should create a hard deadline that persons <u>must</u> be released from solitary confinement within 30 days, whether through release to general population, transfer, or transition to a housing pod within IMU that allows for improved conditions.	Per policy 320.200 Administrative Segregation G.2., the Department has a policy statement and practice of housing an individual in “segregation for a maximum of 30 days, regardless of the placement designation.” Beyond that timeframe, the department has structured actions that must occur. Within those 30 days, there is an amount of due process that must occur. Mandatorily reducing the allotted 30-day timeframe across the board, regardless of circumstance and situation, contains risk for both incarcerated individuals and staff, and the department cannot agree with the recommendation. That said, the department is interested in creating more pathways for review and consideration up the organizational chain of command to include the missioned housing program administrator and a deputy prisons director to ensure that individuals are housed in segregation for the least amount of time, preferably less than 30 days.
Investigations that result in a person’s extended placement in IMU need to be evaluated for efficiency and whether the security threat justifies the length of stay in administrative segregation. To speed up investigations, DOC may need to deploy additional staff resources and/or provide greater oversight and approval by DOC HQ as to what constitutes a “significant threat” such that an <u>extended</u> investigation is required.	The Department sees merit and agrees with the recommendation. The Department will look toward requesting additional staffing resources to both investigate circumstances at the local facility level and evaluate and provide greater oversight from headquarters as to what constitutes an “extraordinary situation” such that an extended investigation is required.

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The Department has investigated the situations cited in the report and has worked toward resolution of both those cited and overall time spent in administrative segregation. It continues to actively work on methods to reduce time spent and improve conditions for time spent within administrative segregation. The Department does care about the mental and physical well-being of those in its custody and continues to work on betterment of conditions proactively and continuously for those in its custody, including those in administrative segregation. The Department has been working collaboratively with the Vera Institute of Justice since February 2019 to develop reforms to reduce the Department's use of restrictive housing safely and significantly. Since that time, the Department has successfully undertaken reductions in the total number of individuals in restrictive housing and reduction in the median length of stay in maximum custody.

The information provided in the administrative segregation report 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 custody is a fair and safe space for all incarcerated individuals.

We also appreciate your team's understanding of the unique processes across the correctional system and the addition of policies and procedures, as well as additional resource requests, being put in place to address them. We are working proactively to continuously improve quality assurance standards throughout the department. Moving forward, the Washington Department of Corrections will continue to collaborate with the Office of the Corrections Ombuds to strengthen procedures and practices that positive impact individuals' health, safety and welfare.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Strange
Secretary