

# OFFICE OF THE CORRECTIONS OMBUDS MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

DEC. 2023

## What's new with the OCO?

### Unexpected Fatality Review Annual Report

The OCO published its first standalone annual report on Unexpected Fatality Reviews (UFR). RCW 72.09.770 directs the Department of Corrections to convene an Unexpected Fatality Review Committee when the death of an incarcerated individual is unexpected, or for any case identified by the OCO for review. The DOC, the OCO, and the Department of Health all must participate. OCO's report covers the unexpected fatality recommendations and reports published by DOC in Fiscal Year 2023 (July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023).

Last fiscal year, there were **54** total deaths in DOC Custody; **29** of those deaths were unexpected due to:

10 – Overdose	1 – Homicide
6 – Vascular Disease	1 – Respiratory
6 – Suicide	1 – Accident
3 – Infection	1 – Medication Complications

After every unexpected death, the DOC is required to implement recommendations from the UFR committee to prevent future deaths. Of the 63 planned reforms, the OCO verified that 56 have been completed by DOC.

### Recent OCO documents uploaded to your tablet (FYI App):

- November 2023 Monthly Outcome Report (MOR)
- November 2023 Monthly Newsletter
- Prison-Initiated Disciplinary Process Recommendations
- Annual Report Fiscal Year 2023
- Unexpected Fatality Review Annual Report Fiscal Year 2023

## FACILITY VISITS

### November 2023

**11.3.23 WSP** – OCO staff met with Health Services, Unit Staff and Facility Leadership; toured the facility; and spoke with individuals housed in various living units.

**11.4.23 MCC** – OCO staff attended the Harvest Festival and met with DOC staff, incarcerated individuals, and their families.

**11.14.23 SCC** – OCO staff visited individuals in the IMU and living units. They also met with the Superintendent prior to their departure.

**11.16.23 WCC** – OCO staff attended a meeting of the Black Prisoners Caucus and later met with several participants. We also visited the receiving units R 1, 2, 3, and the Pine living unit, (formerly R-6) which has been repurposed as the facility's reentry living unit.



## Director's Corner



a message from  
Caitlin Robertson, PhD

**Happy December!** In the Northern Hemisphere, the winter solstice is the 24-hour period with the fewest daylight hours of the year. This year, winter solstice is December 22<sup>nd</sup>. On the shortest day of the year, the OCO Team will gather for an all-staff, in-service day. We will learn in community and share a meal together.

At the OCO, we are gearing up for a short legislative session, starting on January 8, 2024. We are following bills that impact our state's prisons and are prepared to provide technical assistance to help make sure that legislators work to safeguard the health, safety, and welfare of the communities we all serve – including all the people living and working in our state's corrections system.

As we look to the end of this year and the start of the next, I wish for you meaningful time with friends and family that you care about and who care for you too. May you close this year filled with the promises of a hopeful new year.

Onward!

## The OCO's Forecast...

### *What to expect from us in the future*

- The OCO has closed interviews for the Solitary Confinement Project. Thank you to everyone who called our hotline and expressed an interest in participating.
- Our next Community Meeting will be held at Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women on January 19, 2024.

## OCO Assistance Provided Highlight

In May of this year, DOC made an announcement that religious groups were no longer allowed to light candles for their religious ceremonies and must use electric candles as an alternative. The prohibition on open flames also would apply to incense. The OCO received many concerns regarding this change and Early Resolution Ombuds, David Skattebo, took the lead on investigating this issue. Nothing in the policy, Religious Programs 560.200, specifically states open flames are not allowed indoors for religious ceremonies. After extensive negotiations with DOC leadership, DOC agreed to allow the use of smoke producing substances (candles and incense) for indoor religious ceremonial services.

## OCO Participating in DOC Work Groups

Recently the OCO joined two DOC-led workgroups: the Residential Treatment Unit (RTU) Workgroup and the Transition & Release Policy Workgroup.

The goal of the RTU Workgroup is to develop policies that apply specifically to the RTUs. The workgroup has already begun addressing topics such as RTU programs, unit operations, classification, treatment criteria, and the disciplinary program within RTUs. Disability Rights Washington (DRW) is also participating.

The Transition & Release Policy Workgroup will be reviewing DOC 350.200 for necessary updates. The OCO and other community stakeholders will be focusing on the reentry planning process and ways that DOC can provide additional support.

### OCO Confidential Hotline Hours

Call us: (360) 664-4749

Mon: 1:00-3:00 pm

Tue: 1:00-3:00 pm; 5:30-8:00 pm

Wed: 5:30-8:00 pm

Thurs: 1:00-3:00 pm

### Write to us:

#### Office of the Corrections Ombuds

P.O. Box 40009

Olympia, WA 98504

**Correspondence with the OCO is confidential and is not monitored by the DOC. RCW 43.06C.060**