

OFFICE OF THE CORRECTIONS OMBUDS MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

NOV. 2023

What's new with the OCO?

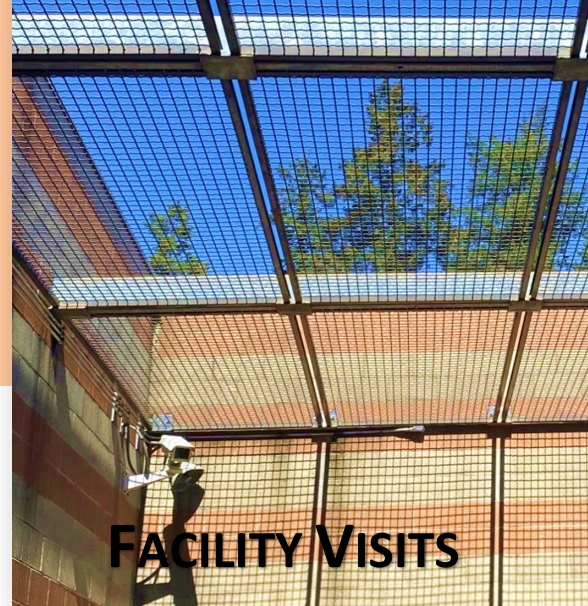
OCO Annual Report

We published our Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report this month on November 1, 2023. Here are a few highlights from our work this past fiscal year (July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023):

- The OCO opened 3,657 cases from approximately 1,779 incarcerated individuals.
- The top three concerns reported are related to Healthcare, Discipline/Behavior Observation Entries, and Supervision/Staff Conduct.
- Our Public Records Requests have increased by more than 100% since 2020.
- Systemic Concerns the OCO reviewed included - Mail, COVID-19 Deaths, Unfair Disciplinary Actions, and Withheld Payments for DNR Fire Crew.
- The OCO completed 93 facility visits.
- Ongoing concerns with the Residential Treatment Units, including a significant increase in the number of deaths by suicide in RTUs.
- Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) training for OCO staff.

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

September 2023 Monthly Outcome Report (MOR)
October 2023 Monthly Outcome Report (MOR)
October 2023 Monthly Newsletter
Prison-Initiated Disciplinary Process Recommendations
Annual Report Fiscal Year 2023



FACILITY VISITS

10.2.23 OCC – OCO staff visited the Secured Housing Unit and met with staff and incarcerated individuals.

10.5.23 & 10.6.23 CBCC – OCO staff met with DOC Leadership, visited the living units, solitary confinement, and held two quarterly community meetings.

10.14.23 & 10.15.23 WSP – Solitary Confinement Workgroup visited the IMU North & South, COA, conducted cell front visits, and met with DOC staff.

10.17.23 SCCC – OCO staff met with tier reps and Director of Nursing to discuss health services concerns.

10.18.23 CCCC – OCO staff met with incarcerated people, and DOC staff.

10.18.23 SCCC – Solitary Confinement Workgroup visited the IMU and spoke with incarcerated people housed in the IMU.

10.19.23 MCC – OCO staff met with DOC leadership and visited the mailroom. During the visit, OCO staff observed mail processing procedures.

10.28.23 WCC – OCO staff attended the Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Event.

Director's Corner



a message from
Caitlin Robertson, PhD

Happy November! Did you know that November is National Gratitude Month? Research suggests that practicing gratitude on a regular basis can produce the following benefits:

- Stronger immune system and lower blood pressure
- Higher level of positive emotions
- Stronger, more compassionate relationships

I am grateful that I get to work alongside courageous public employees who are bold and persistent problem solvers, the OCO staff: Angee, Chase, David, Elisabeth, E.V., Heather, Jessica, Madison, Rebecca, Sara, Stella, and Zak.

We wish you a happy gratitude month and hope you have many opportunities to express your appreciation and joy with friends, family, loved ones, colleagues, and coworkers.

Onward!

OCO Report: Prison-Initiated Disciplinary Process Recommendations

In alignment with our vision of a more humane and transparent Washington corrections system, we published our report to demonstrate the wide gap between the OCO's recommendations and the current WA DOC Policy. After more than four years of case investigations, individual resolutions, policy reviews, and discussions with WA DOC staff and leadership, the OCO made two broad recommendations to improve the WA DOC prison-initiated disciplinary process:

1. Change the "some evidence" standard to a "preponderance of the evidence" standard
2. Enforce the infraction review policy as outlined in WAC 137-28-270 and DOC Policy 460.000(II)(2)

Unfortunately, the WA DOC appears unwilling to make these needed changes. By remaining committed to only relying on "some evidence" as its standard to uphold prison-initiated disciplinary infractions, WA DOC trails behind Oregon, California, Hawaii, Alaska and other states. Even Texas, which lacks the prison reform structure that the WA DOC is implementing, utilizes a preponderance of the evidence standard.

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

The OCO's Forecast...

What to expect from us in the future

- OCO staff will be joining incarcerated individuals and their families at several Winter events in December.
- Our next Quarterly Community Meeting is in January 2024. The prison location has not been determined yet.

OCO Assistance Provided Highlight

Assistant Corrections Ombuds – Resolutions, Stella Spracklin, worked on a concern impacting incarcerated individuals at Olympic Corrections Center (OCC). Prior to the negotiation, incarcerated people arriving at OCC had to earn the right to access their personal televisions through good behavior. Our office received numerous complaints surrounding this issue because losing an earned privilege didn't align with minimum custody status. OCC is a camp, and individuals have already earned MI2 custody to be housed in this facility. Stella worked with OCC leadership as well as DOC Headquarters to implement positive change. Last month, the DOC agreed to allow all individuals access to their personal TVs upon arrival at OCC.

Write to us:

Office of the Corrections Ombuds

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