

Unannounced Jail Inspection
Performed by Bethany Hallam & MAN-E
6/29/24 Arrival 15:20 Departure 20:05

The nature of our visit was to check on incarcerated persons (IPS) at the request of their loved ones. We arrived at 15:20 and were quickly greeted by an escort. We were then escorted to several housing units, where we observed jail operations and spoke to numerous IPS. Our findings include complaints about several key issues, such as Medical Treatment, Tablets, Food, the Commissary, and the treatment by jail staff.

We met an individual with severe dental issues after a car accident that led to multiple surgeries. He was told the jail dentist wouldn't treat him, as it was a "liability" for the dentist to do so. He has experienced a refusal of service from numerous jail providers, and was told he needs the expertise of an oral surgeon, which the jail has still not made an appointment with. He is in excruciating pain daily, and has trouble eating.

An individual also stated he was forced off of suboxone after being accused of "diverting" his medication. He wished to appeal the decision, and was pressured to sign a refusal form saying he refused his medications when he expressed that interest, which he declined to sign.

We met a man who told us earlier that day he suffered an asthma attack and sought help from the Corrections Officer, who took 1.5 hours to respond. By the time he received medical treatment, his asthma attack provoked a panic attack. He was visibly shaken up when we spoke to him.

Another very concerning medical issue we observed was an individual who had severe wounds on his hands and forearms, and even had to have a portion of his finger amputated. He expressed concern that he does not get his dressings changed regularly, and that when he does see wound care they refuse to give him any spare bandaging to change the dressings himself in between wound care providers appointments. This has led to him having to suffer through wet, foul-smelling bandages after each shower, and he is increasingly concerned about infection.

Several people reported issues with their tablets, including that repair requests were not being addressed. People complained that their tablets were dying before they could be charged during the day and expressed a desire to charge them throughout the day. The cutoff time for tablets is 22:00, but people reported their tablets were being taken away prematurely, as early as 20:30 each day, on numerous pods. Also, individuals working their cases pro se were unable to print legal documents from their tablets as they're legally required to do and the inmate handbook allows. There was also a lack of paper complaint forms on the pod, which is the only alternative when the tablet fails.

There were also at least a dozen reports of IPS filling out Jail Oversight Board Liaison request forms and never receiving a visit from the liaison. It was especially concerning considering these IPS were under the impression that these forms went to the full JOB, so they thought it was us

not doing our job and ignoring them. We have never seen a single request form that the liaison has received.

There were general complaints about the quality and safety of the food being served. IPS reported mice droppings and a worm being found on trays. One IPS even told us officers saw the worm in the food and filed an incident report on the issue, but nothing was followed up on. People were upset about the lack of variety in the meals and the disparity between the menu and the actual meals received. They also expressed a concern for the lack of access to drinking water, explaining that the only water they have available to them is drinking from the sinks in their cell, and the occasional access to hot water in the evenings.

Several IPS expressed a desire to have the previous commissary provider, Keefe, return. Multiple people complained about commissary orders that they never received, not being refunded for those orders, or being charged a restocking fee despite the return not being any fault of their own.

A few IPS asked about the restrictions on who is able to be a worker in the jail, and why the existing workers haven't been receiving the contact visits they were told workers receive.

We talked to two IPS whose names were "in the red" (on the list to be released) for 3-5 days without having been released yet.

Another concern brought up to us was why the main gym was being used as storage instead of as a space for IPS to recreate, as was the former use of that space.

There were numerous complaints about abuse and mistreatment by the employees, especially by a specific Sergeant named Sarver, including allegations of malicious, targeted strip searches. There was also a grave concern about the shotguns being used by the emergency response team, and three separate reports of an officer opening an IPS cell door to allow other IPS into their cell to steal their belongings or assault them.

Our findings suggest significant problems and dissatisfaction with the conditions and treatment of Incarcerated Persons in the Allegheny County Jail.