

Inspection Date: Tuesday, October 1, 2024
Time of Inspection: 17:05 - 19:05
JOB Members: Bethany Hallam & MAN-E
Greeted by Captain Lee Estock

The primary reason for our visit was to observe video surveillance of the woman who recently passed away in the Allegheny County Jail. We were denied access and told the reason was because “it was an ongoing investigation.” This is in complete defiance of the state statute governing the Jail Oversight Board, 61 Pa.C.S. §§ 1721-1728. Per the statute, the board has investigative authority to access all documents and records at all times.

Section 1724 (e) states, “The board shall investigate allegations of inadequate prison conditions and improper practices occurring within the prison and may make such other investigations or reviews of prison operation and maintenance. The books, papers and records of the prison, including, but not limited to, the papers and records of the warden and those relating to individual inmates, shall at all times be available for inspection by the board.”

We further believe that the jail refusing to follow the law that governs its oversight undermines the authority of the Jail Oversight Board and jeopardizes the well-being of the incarcerated individuals within our care.

Medication and Recreation Time Issues

- Incarcerated persons in Pod 3F report that medication distribution occurs at 18:30, resulting in the loss of an hour and a half of recreation time, as they are locked down at 20:00.
- Incarcerated persons have requested that medications be administered after 20:00, noting that 18:30 is too early for their nighttime doses.
- This issue is described as a recurring problem affecting the whole jail, significantly impacting recreation and overall well-being.

Complaints Regarding Corrections Officer Bush

- Several incarcerated persons have raised complaints against Corrections Officer Bush, alleging inappropriate conduct, including racist remarks and targeted harassment.
- Specific incidents include CO Bush making derogatory comments about an incarcerated person’s mother and posting a “Dunatics” list of individuals he accused of using K2.
- Despite repeated complaints, incarcerated persons report no corrective action has been taken, and the behavior continues to be a source of distress and tension.

Incarcerated Person Rashad Fitzgerald's Concerns

We spoke at length with Rashad, and he consented to share his information and experience.

- Rashad Fitzgerald expresses confusion over the reason for his current incarceration, suspecting a probation violation but not being informed of the specifics.
- He also alleges that upon his return to jail, Sergeant Godineaux injured his already dislocated shoulder despite him being in a sling and not resisting.
- Fitzgerald was placed in solitary confinement for 40 days following a misconduct charge. Upon release, he was informed he owed an additional ten days, which he did not understand.
- Fitzgerald is experiencing significant personal hardship, having lost six family members recently, and is in urgent need of counseling and emotional support, which he states, at the time of our conversation, he had not been provided.

Additional Complaints and Concerns from Incarcerated Persons

- Incarcerated persons are frustrated by the requirement to lock in their cells while meal trays are being distributed, which they say disrupts their recreation time and has not always been the practice in the ACJ.
- They also report being locked down every Saturday from 15:00 until Monday morning, during which they cannot charge their tablets, further limiting communication and access to resources.
- There are complaints about the tablets being confiscated at 20:00, even though they remain functional until 22:00, reducing time for personal and educational use.
- Incarcerated persons report the removal of a Quran app from the tablets and limited access to various versions of the Quran in print, causing concern among Muslim incarcerated persons.
- An incident was reported involving a mentally ill individual who was tased shortly after being brought into the pod. Several people expressed concerns that individuals were being returned to general population without receiving the appropriate amount of mental health care.

Commissary and Legal Document Access Issues

- Incarcerated persons in Pod 3F are experiencing issues with commissary deliveries, including missed orders and the failure to provide refunds.
- One individual specifically reports difficulties obtaining a copy of a motion he wrote and accessing his docket sheets, highlighting concerns about limited access to legal resources and paper copies of documents on their tablet to take to court with them or to take with them when they are released from the ACJ.

- More broadly, incarcerated persons have raised complaints about commissary orders not being processed and the lack of communication when deliveries are missed, exacerbating frustrations.

Conclusion

Our findings include significant concerns about medication administration, officer misconduct, mental health support, and access to essential services such as commissary and legal documents. These issues point to systemic challenges within the Allegheny County Jail that require immediate attention from the administration to ensure the humane treatment of incarcerated individuals and adherence to proper correctional facility standards. Addressing these issues promptly is essential for improving conditions and safeguarding the rights and well-being of all incarcerated persons.