



Washington State Auditor's Office Performance Audit Description

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Prison Safety and Security

Program Background

In response to the January 29, 2011, on-duty murder of Correctional Officer Jayme Biendl by an offender at the Monroe Correctional Center, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 5907 at the governor's request, requiring the state to implement new safety measures for prisons and community corrections.

The Department of Corrections (DOC) has since made changes to the safety and security program in its 12 prisons. Changes include additional safety and security training for staff, changes to Department policies, and new safety committees at each prison to review the staff's concerns. The Department also created a statewide security committee to evaluate concerns and suggestions that may impact department policy or require funding from the legislature.

Even with these changes, significant challenges remain. Members of DOC's Statewide Security Advisory Committee have noted a decline in the number of incidents, but also raised concerns about the severity of incidents, as well as rising mental health issues and gang involvement in the offender population. The state correctional officers' union expressed concerns that the reforms have not done enough to ensure their safety.

Scope and objectives

The objectives of this performance audit are designed to assess whether the Department could do more to ensure the safety and security of its correctional officers. The audit will seek to answer the following questions:

- Does the Department's prison safety and security program meet industry leading practices and standards, and in areas where it does not, why?
- Have recent changes in the Department's prison safety and security program improved the safety and security of prison staff?
- What information does the Department use to understand whether its program is improving prison staff safety and security, and is the information adequate for managing the program?
- What additional changes could the Department make to improve the safety and security of prison staff?

We plan to hire subject matter experts to assist us in conducting this audit.

Timing

Audit results will be released in summer 2015.

March 2014