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**Survey Report**



# **Analysis of 2022-23 MQPL Survey Comments**

**Top issues reported by  
respondents at Dixon  
Correctional Center**

# Dixon Correctional Center

Dixon Correctional Center is a medium-security male prison within the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) that housed 1,506 people on October 12, 2022. The John Howard Association of Illinois (JHA) conducted a modified short [Measuring the Quality of Prison Life](#) (MQPL) survey by providing enough survey packets (consisting of the [MQPL survey](#), an informed consent notice/instruction sheet, and a privileged mail prepaid business reply envelope addressed to JHA) so that every person incarcerated at Dixon had an opportunity to participate in the voluntary and anonymous survey if they chose to do so. JHA received 443 responses to the MQPL survey from people at Dixon through May 3, 2023, representing approximately 30% of the static population. JHA visited Dixon close in time to survey distribution.

This report highlights some of the most common issues raised in response to our MQPL survey question **"What are the most negative things about life in this prison?"** We selected this question to analyze because it is where most survey respondents chose to report the issues that they were experiencing while incarcerated. All survey comments for Dixon can be found in our [2022-23 Survey Comments](#) report. Quantitative survey results for Dixon can be found in our [2022-23 Survey Results](#) report.

## Methodology

To identify the most common issues, we identified the most common words people used in response to the question "What are the most negative things about life in this prison?" For the Top Ten Words, all instances of each word and its plural form were counted (e.g., "program" and "programs.") Hyphenated words were counted as one word. Words like "the" and "not" were filtered from the analysis. Then, indicator words were counted under seven issue categories to determine top issues in each facility's survey responses. When an indicator word appeared within a longer word, the longer word was included. For example: the indicator word, "medic," picked up both "medical" and "medication." Prior to the issue analysis, the language in each report was standardized so that indicator words consistently appeared in a form that would be picked up by our software (e.g. "CO" was changed to "C/O," "good time" was changed to "good-time"). The indicator words by issue can be found [here](#).

To avoid double-counting issues, issue categories were only counted once per response. This means that the response "the cells are cold and dirty" would count as raising only one issue related to conditions, even though two indicator words ("cold" and "dirty") are used in the response.

There are limitations with this method, such as sentiment analysis. For example we are unable to distinguish statements such as "The doctor is good" and "I haven't seen a doctor." However, it is reasonable to conclude that instances of "doctor" are in a negative context in response to the question. Additionally, some indicator words that were frequently applied to multiple issue categories were removed. For example, we did not include "job" under productive activity because we could not distinguish statements relevant to the issue area, like "I can't get a job," from statements relevant to other issue areas, like "Staff don't do their jobs." Nor did we include "cell" under movement, e.g. "I am in my cell 24/7," because we could not distinguish from "School is always cancelled" or "The cells are too small" under this method of counting.

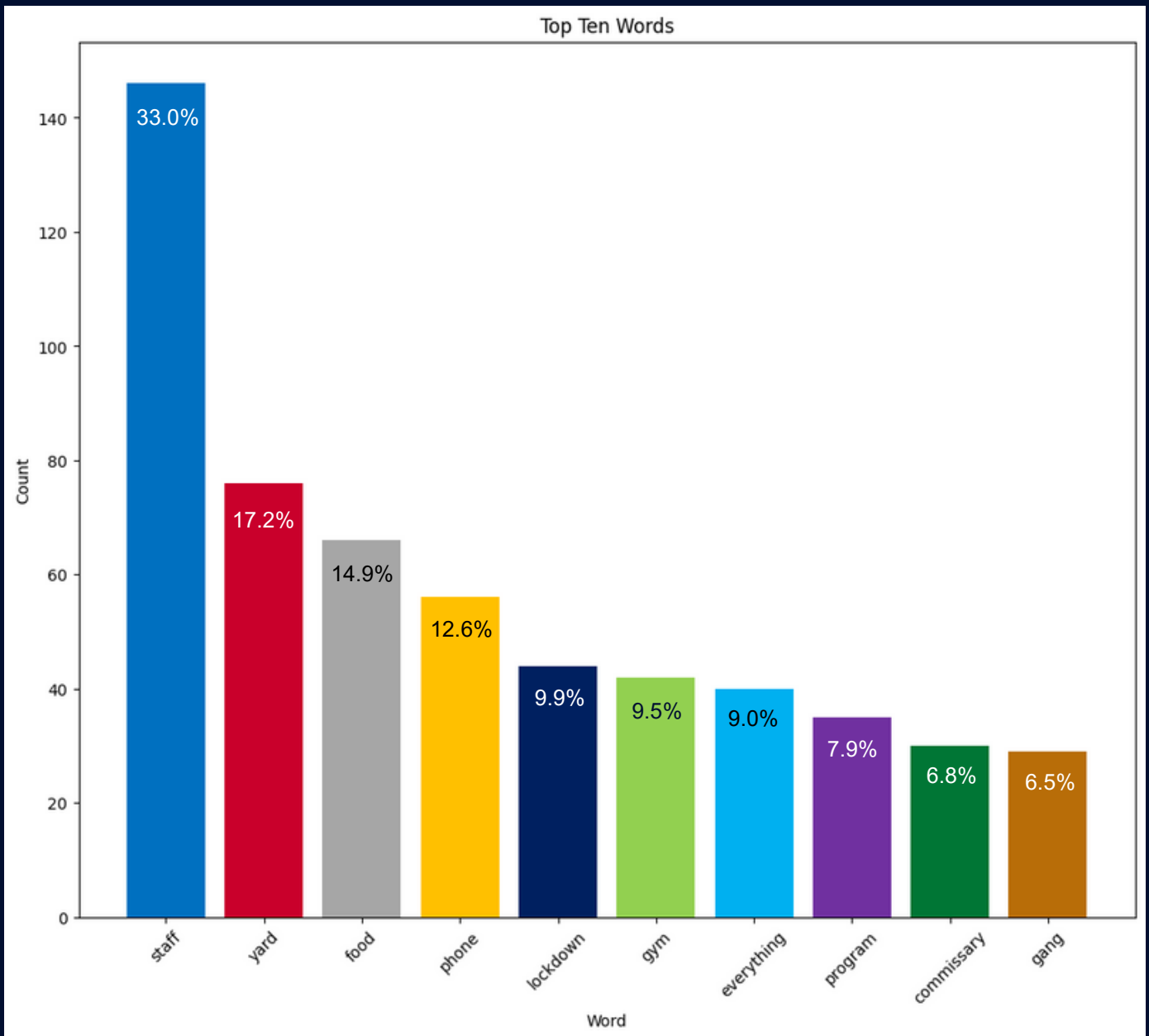
This report includes quotes from survey responses that we found to be either representative of the diversity of issues raised for each category or particularly insightful. Some quotes have been abbreviated to highlight the relevant issue.



## Top 10 Indicator Words

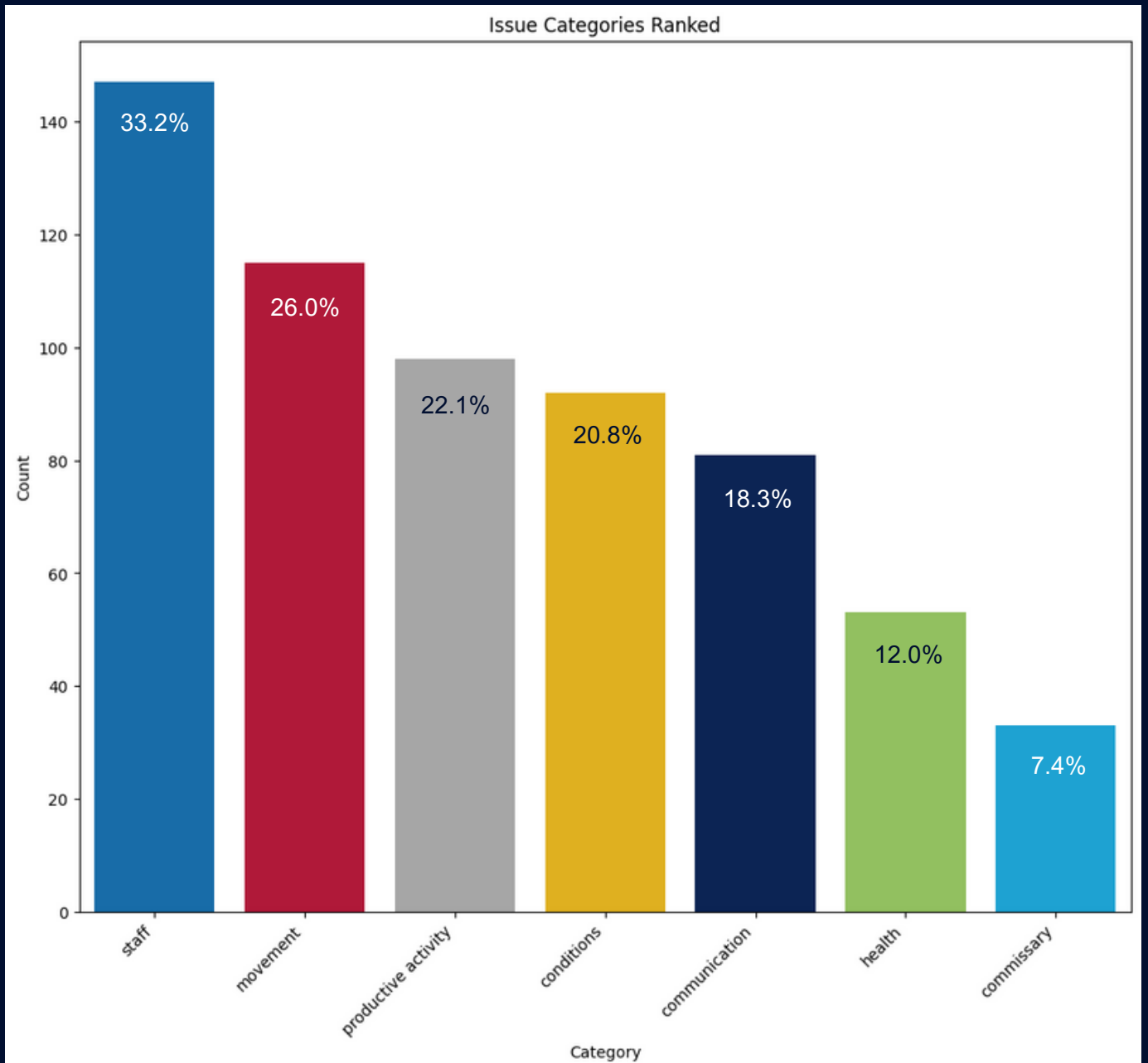
Used in responses to "What are the most negative things about life in this prison?"

Percentages are of the survey responses in which the word appeared.



## Issue Categories Ranked by Prevalence

Issue rankings are determined by indicator word frequency. Common words used in survey responses have been sorted into seven issue categories. When a survey response uses one of a category's indicator words, it is tallied as raising an issue in that category. For example, a survey with the words "medical," "nurse," or "infection" is tallied as raising an issue related to health. Survey responses may include more than one issue. Percentages are of the survey responses in which an issue was raised.



# Selected direct quotes from Dixon survey responses

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## STAFF

Encompasses issues related to prison staff, such as lack of staff or staff conduct.

Not looked at as a human, but as a felon—many staff say "It's not my problem."

Staff will write you up for anything and it is impossible to beat a write-up.

How people in prison is treated and punished by staff. I feel I already was sentenced by a judge already and that they shouldn't come to work trying to punish me again.

Not enough officers to safely run prison.

The staff are malicious in their conduct. Firing people from Kitchen for the smallest infractions, putting all their energy and resources into giving us tickets, shaking us down, and putting us in Segregation.

2

## MOVEMENT

Includes concerns about time spent out of the cell or sleeping area and yard/dayroom availability.

Level #1 Lockdown Two or more times a week. Not enough staff to cover Day to Day work

We rarely GET yard or any air outside of the Housing Unit. They always have any number of excuses for why it gets cancelled. We havent Been to the Gym in over 2 1/2 years.

The lockdowns due to staff shortages. You never know if we're gonna wake up on lockdowns and for how long. Even when you're not on lockdown, they never run other programs like school, chapel, and yard; I have not been to the yard since May this year. The gym was closed down on March 2020 and it has not been opened yet, I doubt it ever will. The food—needless to say—has gone way down in quality and quantity in the last few years.

We're in our cells all day. There is no real help/treatment. We don't get to go outside, we don't get to speak to the wardens. People self-harm and it don't seem to matter to anyone.

If we're lucky we get to go outside recreation two or three times a month

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## PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITY

Includes issues related to productive activities, such as work assignments, education, or programming.

You can't get in school until you is short, and when you get short you don't have enough time to finish it.

Opportunities come far and in between. There are few good time opportunities

THEY HAVE NO HIGHER EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS. Plus the few that they do have are only available to those with the least time. Which makes no sense to me because they rarely finish + the ones with longer time clog with idle time. Idle time leaves lots of openings for folly.

Lack of availability to programs to provide drug treatment or other rehabilitation.

It is hard to get into school and Job assignments, very few programs available

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## CONDITIONS

Encompasses issues related to living conditions, such as food, water, temperature, and sanitation.

Mold—black mold all around. Roof leaks. Just a nasty place

The locks on most doors are broken. The roof leaks. The cable is also broken, and 100 of other things.

The prison is falling apart, mold in every unit, were told not to drink the water now, but will not be given bottled water, the dishwasher in chow hall has been broke for 8 months, trays cleaned by hand, food is horrible, amount given, barely would feed a child.

The way the food is served from the dietary. The portions are very small littler than a kids meal.

There food is nasty and this prison never feed you enuff



## 5

## COMMUNICATION

Includes issues related to phone availability, visitation, mail, and other means of communication.

The gang members won't let people like me who are "unaffiliated" use the phones, nor will IA change my pin, even though somebody is using my pin # and I did not authorize it.

There is only 8 phones per every 140 people

I can't use the phone enough to stay in contact with my family

Lockdowns due to shortage of staff. And not being able to talk my family + friends. Cause it is happening so often now. Every weekend for sure.

I was assaulted for using a phone by a gang member.

## 6

## HEALTH

Includes issues related to healthcare, mental health services, and COVID-19 concerns.

When we have any type of health problem they don't help and say we're lying.

Mental health is available, but they don't do anything to really help you or the problem.

Poor health care. No accountability. Some RN's don't like doing their job. They either go to sleep in the nurse's bubble (of the infirmary) or watch TV or ignore our treatments ordered.

The nursing staff is very disrespectful in the way they speak to and act toward us, and they take it upon themselves to override doctors orders inside and out of the prison

It's hard to get into healthcare or sick call

Commissary is very expensive compared to other prisons, with not enough variety.

Lack of commissary items and poor quality merchandise.

The cost of things in commissary

1,400 calorie meal's a day you get hungry and have to Supplement with commissary but only going once a month you cannot buy enough To last a month.

Incredibly bad commissary by The Staff That runs it! Non existent choices or very limited + limits of only 1 of most items + always out of most items, and being incredibly overcharged for All items



This report was compiled by JHA staff. Media inquiries should be directed to JHA's Executive Director Jennifer Vollen-Katz at [jvollen@thejha.org](mailto:jvollen@thejha.org) or 312-291-9183.

Incarcerated individuals can send privileged mail to report concerns and issues to the John Howard Association, P.O. Box 10042, Chicago, IL 60610-0042. JHA staff read every letter and track this information to monitor what is occurring behind prison walls and to advocate for humane policies and practices. Family and friends can contact JHA via our website [www.thejha.org](http://www.thejha.org) or by leaving us a voicemail at (312) 291-9183.

Since 1901, JHA has provided public oversight of Illinois' juvenile and adult correctional facilities. Every year, JHA staff and trained volunteers inspect prisons, jails, and detention centers throughout the state. Based on these inspections, JHA regularly issues reports that are instrumental in improving prison conditions. JHA humbly thanks everyone who graciously shared their experiences and insights with us.



**Defying Injustice.** Defending Humanity.