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**Survey Report**



# **Analysis of 2023 MQPL Survey Comments**

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

# Western Correctional Center

Western Illinois Correctional Center (Western) is a medium-security male prison within the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) that housed 1,637 people on March 27, 2023. 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 Western had an opportunity to participate in the voluntary and anonymous survey if they chose to do so. JHA received 648 responses to the MQPL survey from people at Western through July 19, 2023, representing approximately 38% of the static population. We also received comments from seven respondents, or 15%, of the 46 people at the Clayton Work Camp, for which Western is the parent facility. JHA visited Western in June 2023.

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 can be found in our [Western and Clayton Work Camp 2023 MQPL Survey Comments](#) report. Quantitative survey results can be found in our [Western 2023 MQPL 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.

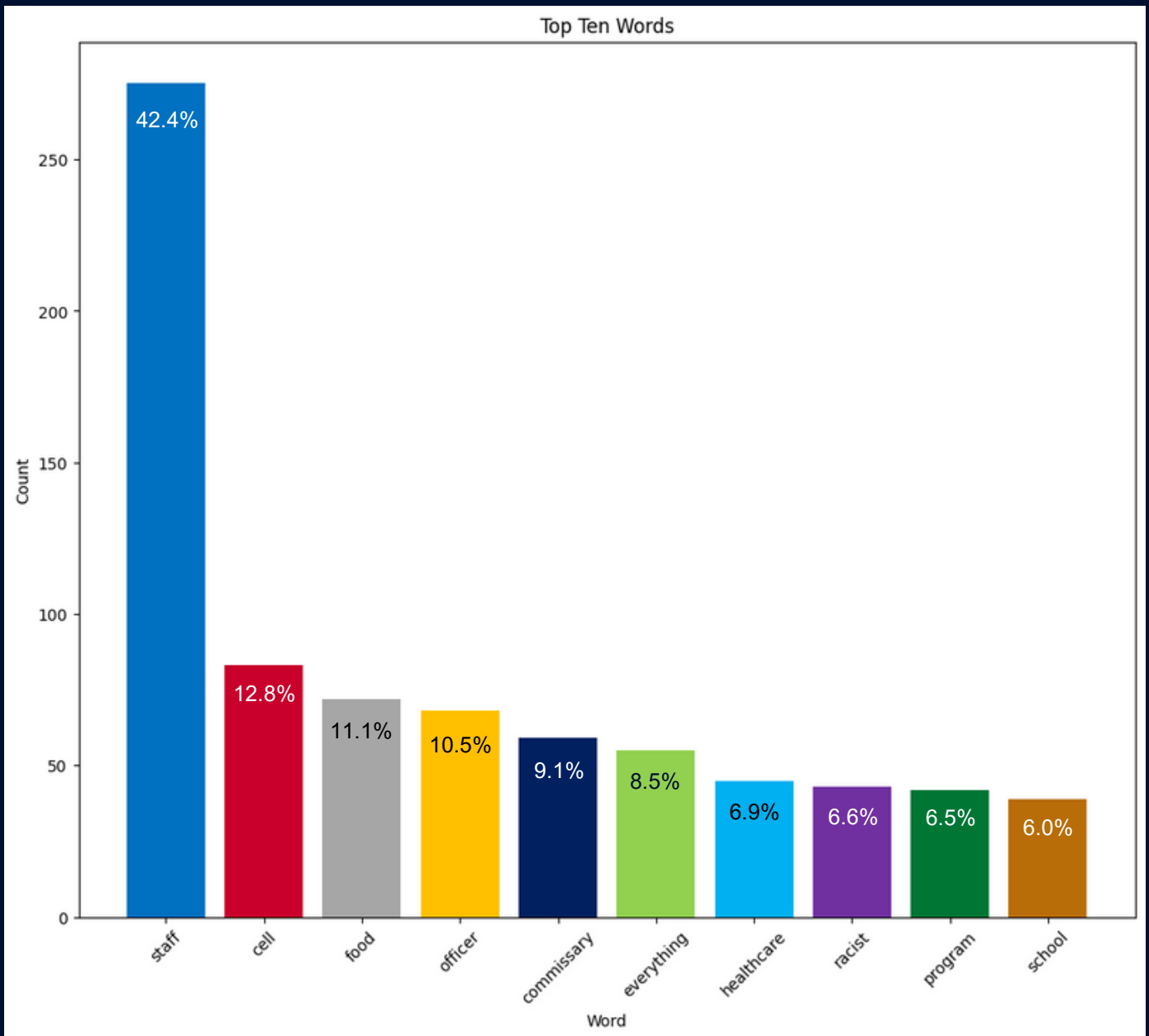
This report includes quotes from survey responses that we found to be either representative of the diversity of issues raised for each category or particularly insightful. Some quotes have been abbreviated to highlight the relevant issue.



## Top 10 Indicator Words

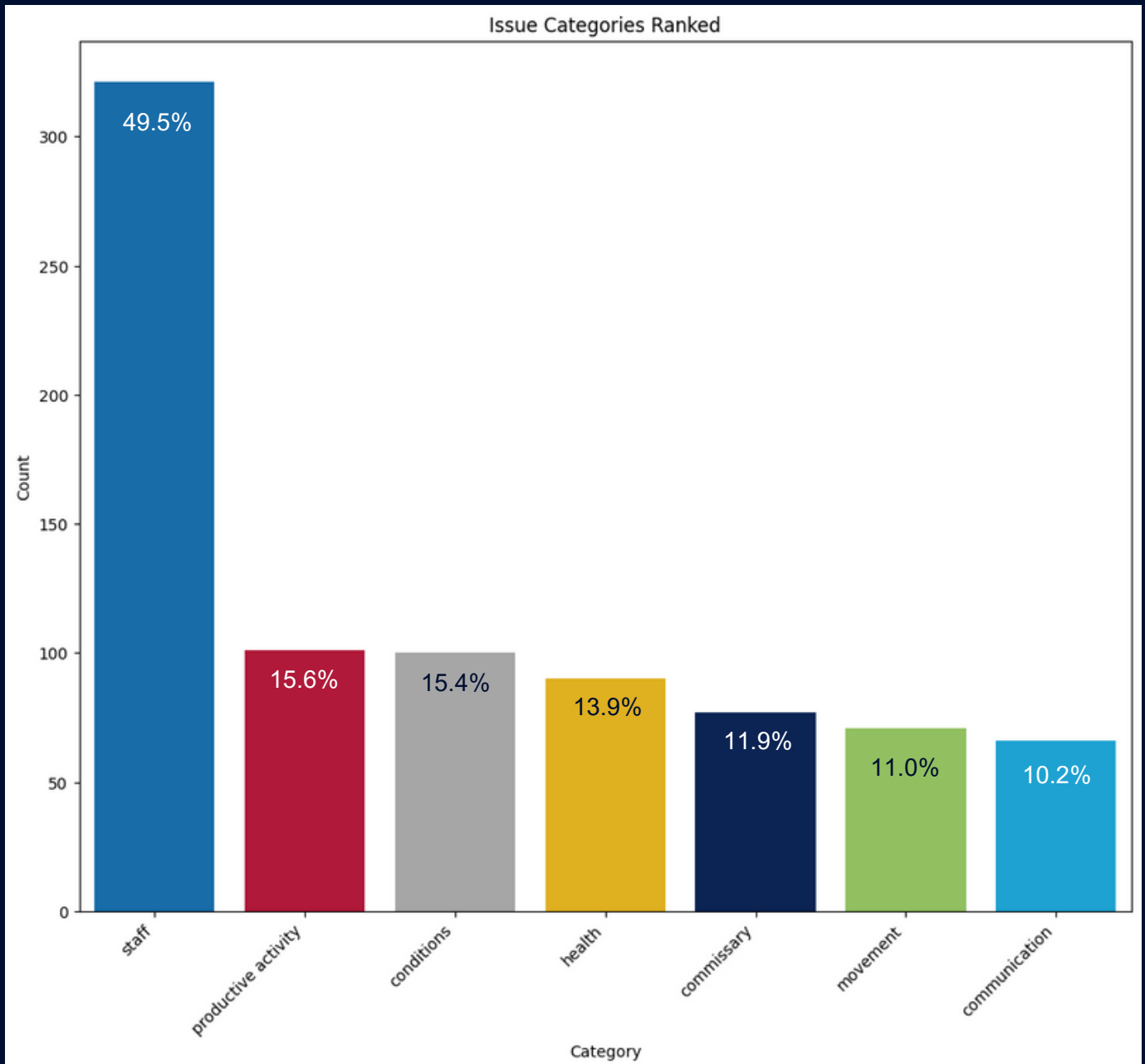
Used in responses to "What are the most negative things about life in this prison?"

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 Western survey responses

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## STAFF

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

Staff are able to act with zero accountability. Any C/O can write me a ticket for ANYTHING, whether I actually did it or not, and I WILL be found guilty. Some staff are honestly just bullies.

The hostile combative and degrading and oppressive conditions and treatment by security staff.

The corrections officers talk to individuals in custody in an aggressive and highly demeaning manner. They also choose to threaten individuals and write unnecessary tickets rather than talk calmly and explain unknown rules to individuals in custody.

The white officers always target black men for patt-downs in cellhouses and outside of dining hall. Officers are quick to send black men to segregation for the smallest disagreements or resistance.

There's a cultural disconnect between staff and the incarcerated and it leads to high racism decisions by staff to the incarcerated

2

## PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITY

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

Can't get in school if your outdate is not within 2-3 years of release.

No matter how hard you try to better yourself by programs, school, work they do everything not to let you earn good time or try to better yourself they only want to keep you locked in a cell

1.5 hours of dayroom a day. They don't have enough programs. They ~~do~~ only have 1 teacher and they make it extremely difficult to get involved unless you are on your way out the door. If you have more than 2 years then it's pretty much out of the question. And if you can get good time they tend to keep you out of work and school programs until its time for you to leave. It seems like they don't want people to get good time.

Jobs are unavailable to men w/ any sexual offense on their background, except maybe as a wing porter—but then some staff members use that info against them

It is next to impossible to get a job or get into school. I have a lot of time left to do and am shut down because of my time/crime. I haven't been able to do much positive in the past 10 years

### 3

## CONDITIONS

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

We are fed food that I have never eaten on the outside while staff enjoy Fried chicken, pizzas and other items from the inmate kitchen.

Inadequate ventilation in the cells during the summer months

① NO VENTILATION SYSTEM WORKS. THE ONLY WAY TO GET SOME AIR FLOW IS BY OUR WINDOWS, THAT IS YEAR-ROUND. ② NO AIR CONDITIONING. ③ NO GOOD PEST CONTROL. THE ANTS GET INTO YOUR FOOD BY CRAWLING THROUGH THE CRACKS IN THE WALLS OR HEATER ALONG THE WALL. ④ THE EXHAUST VENTS DON'T WORK SO NO CIRCULATION OF FOUL AIR OR SICKNESS. ⑤ NO TRANSFERS ARE DONE FOR THOSE OF US WHO'VE BEEN APPROVED. ⑥ ALWAYS A FOOD SHORTAGE IN THE KITCHEN WHERE IT DOESN'T LINE UP WITH THE MENU.

During summer it feels like over 100 degrees in the cell house.

They feed us hot dogs at least 7 times a week. Food rations are sufficient for a child, maybe.

### 4

## HEALTH

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

Healthcare and mental health is run very poorly, understaffed and getting medication refills or perscription renewals are always delayed for weeks + months.

Dr. & healthcare passes/access is disregarded and cancelled all the time!!! Poor response to medical emergencies (Dental care is non-existent, it seems like).

The health care is so bad. It is as if Wexford is waiting for us to die ~~to~~ so they will not have to spend time and money on our health.

As for medical, it is completely outrageous. Sick call requests take months nad you have to be dying for any "emergency" to be deemed an emergency.

You have to write healthcare a million times to see the doctor.



5

COMMISSARY

Encompasses issues such as frequency of shopping opportunity and item availability.

We only shop once a month.

We go to commissary once a month. Commissary is always out of items despite us rarely going.

The officers running the commissary are totally incompetent & lazy & the warden allows them to shop us only once per month & run out of items constantly. We run out of soap & other necessities all the time.

Commissary only once a month for the most part. Out of product including clothes and food at commissary.

Commissary: slow, limited product choices and availability.

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MOVEMENT

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

You are confined in cell 22 1/2 hours a day, and if your "single cell" status it can be like your entire time is in Segregation. You have nobody to talk to, laugh with, or anything.

And as long as you're on this C-Grade wing they give you no calls, no yards, no gym, no commissary.

We only get an hour & a half out of our cell a day that's to shower make calls that's not enough time with 30 people needing to do the same thing

Not enough time for Dayrooms only 1 hr 30 min once a day therefore not able to maintain a good contact with people on the outside.

Only 2 yards a week

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

We really need phone's on the tablet.

Horrible Video Visit connections, Lengthy time lapses for Emails, Limited Access to Phone/Family

TIME OUT OF CELL AND MAINTAINING MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOVED ONES. WHAT I MEAN IS HERE WE'RE ONLY GIVEN 1 1/2 HRS. OUT OF CELL A DAY FOR DAYROOM AND THERE'S SIX PHONES FOR 28+ PEOPLE SO YOU GO DAYS W/ NO CONTACT AND MESSAGES RUN 3-4 DAYS LATE SAME AS SNAIL MAIL.

We only can talk to our families for a sort amount of time. We come out once a day for 1 hour 30 mins & everyone wants to use the phone but there only 6 phones available

C-grade unit because the punishmentnets are to severe, no phone calls and no t.v and tablet that I paid for



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.