
**Communications
Report**



Prison Communications Summary

January through June 2022

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Introduction

In the first half of 2022 JHA staff fielded nearly 1,000 communications – including 475 letters from people who are incarcerated in the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) and nearly 100 additional letters from people residing in out-of-state, Illinois county, Illinois federal, or unidentified facilities. In addition to these letters received, JHA tracked issues from 375 calls and emails from people in the community.

Top 10 IDOC Prisons JHA Received Letters from between January and June 2022	
<u>IDOC Prison</u>	<u>Percent of Letters</u>
Western	9%
Menard	8%
Dixon	8%
Lawrence	7%
Pinckneyville	7%
Graham	6%
Hill	5%
Big Muddy	5%
Pontiac	5%
Illinois River	4%

(Note: Percentages calculated out of a total of 475 letters from people incarcerated in Illinois prisons. JHA received letters from 26 IDOC prisons in the first half of 2022: Big Muddy, Centralia, Danville, Dixon, East Moline, Graham, Hill, Illinois River, Jacksonville, Joliet Treatment Center, Lawrence, Lincoln, Logan, Menard, Pinckneyville, Pontiac, Robinson, Shawnee, Sheridan, Southwestern, Stateville, NRC, Taylorville, Vandalia, Vienna, and Western.)

The information JHA receives through communications is continually used to follow up with IDOC administrators as well as to advocate for and advance improvements.

Please note that JHA is not able to investigate or confirm much of the information shared. JHA also acknowledges that there will be wide variation in issues and practices over time and across the state. We have consolidated the information we have received and share it as an anecdotal

resource to promote system and organizational transparency, and to increase public awareness of the issues impacting people who live and work in Illinois' prisons.

In providing an anonymous summary of these reports, JHA staff have worked to limit identifying information to the greatest extent possible while still providing a substantive explanation of the concern in order to share content while maintaining confidentiality.

Communications Summary: Issues and Trends in Letters from IDOC

Communications received in the first half of 2022 reflect ongoing concerns related to COVID-19 surges, protocols, and resulting restrictions and changes, but also demonstrate a broader range of concerns than earlier in the pandemic.

Top 5 Issues Communicated to JHA from January through June 2022	
<u>Issue Category</u>	<u>Percent by Issue</u>
Staff Issues	22%
Facility Conditions	15%
Information Access	15%
Commissary & Food	12%
Medical Issues	12%

(Note: Issue tallies include letters, calls and emails regarding IDOC prisons.)

Staff Issues

Reporting about staff conduct continues to be one of the most common reasons people contact JHA. As an organization, we attempt to separate out concerns related to the actions and behavior of staff that fall outside of IDOC protocol from those that are a critique of IDOC policy and practices.

JHA received various reports regarding inappropriate staff conduct. For example, from Western in March, JHA received a report that people who have sex offense convictions were being targeted by an unnamed officer for frequent harassing compliance checks being performed weekly, rather than monthly per the norm: *"He stated this time he keeps a card on hand with the names of inmates with certain crimes, in talking with the other officer and showed him this card! They don't do the whole cell house only certain cells. This is making a hostile environment for us...My cellmate is 77 years old and other is over 80, and these officers harass them."* Another person wrote from Menard MSU in March with concerns about second shift staff retaliating for various reasons by refusing to provide food to certain people, and shared, *"If someone lashes out then the CO's are retaliating back by such things as: not popping our doors for dayroom or tossing our cells."*

People from across the state shared fear of retaliation by staff for filing grievances, or even asking for a staff person's name to be used as part of a grievance. Examples of retaliation included being prevented from accessing the dayroom, phone, or law library; receiving disciplinary tickets or being put into restrictive housing; as well as being spoken to in threatening or harassing manner. In April, a person incarcerated at Centralia wrote that a correctional officer told him, *"Since you want to write grievances, I'm gonna say you punched my glass!"* In another instance, a person at Graham wrote JHA in February sharing, *"If we file a grievance, it is always denied deemed moot and then the officers target us for filing one. The staff and officers try to provoke confrontation by disrespecting us going as far as cursing at us and calling us out of our names, even over the intercom in the house unit. Not all officers but many of them."*

In the first half of 2022, JHA has also heard many reports from people who are incarcerated as well as others in the community about concerns about short staffing and the impact on people inside.

FOR THE SUPERBOWL LAST SUNDAY MOSTLY ALL OF THE MEN CALLED OFF WORK WHICH LEFT FEMALE STAFF IN ALL OF THE HOUSING UNITS & YES ONCE AGAIN INMATES SUFFERED, WE WERE ON LEVEL ONE LOCKDOWN DUE TO SHORT STAFFING. FEMALE OFFICERS CAN'T BE ON THE FLOOR. ONLY MALE OFFICERS,

- From someone incarcerated at Dixon, February 2022

"They are so understaffed the prisoners are on a constant lockdown"

- From an email regarding Hill, May 2022

Correctional Center. They are currently so short staff that they are not letting us out the cell for anything and have their own staff working 24 hour shifts. They will not give us the

- From someone incarcerated at Shawnee, February 2022

JHA received two reports in March about short staffing resulting in only one clinical services staff person at the Pittsfield Work Camp, causing paperwork to be backed up and decisions being made that are not consistent with the policy: *"The counselor has stated to inmates, many times, that he does not believe we should be receiving the sentence credits such as EDSC and earned work credits. He constantly is behind schedule in entering inmates for 'good time' and work release and constantly has his decisions reversed by Springfield."* A person incarcerated at Hill reported to JHA in May that in the two and a half years he had been at the facility, he had not seen or spoken to a counselor despite frequent requests. In general population, people are supposed to have at minimum one contact every two months with counselors.

JHA also received concerns about the lack of Spanish-speaking staff and translations. A person in Lawrence wrote JHA in February recounting: *“On a day vaccinations were being handed out I noticed an Inmate who spoke only Spanish. An elderly man who seemed confused, scared and distressed. I asked him if he knew what was going on. Our brief conversation let me know he did not know why he was getting a shot and did not want it; I also found out that he had allergies to the ingredients in the vaccine. There was an attempt by the nurse and staff to translate, but they themselves did not speak Spanish. Had I not stepped in there could have been harm done to that man. It seemed as if the staff did not even care what would happen to him, there was no papers in his language or an attempt to find an inmate who spoke Spanish.”*

In first half of 2022, JHA continued to receive reports about staff “punishing” people who either refused to get a vaccination or to be tested for COVID. A letter from someone at Vandalia in February shared that *“Inmates are being thrown in ‘the hole’ and all their privileges are taken away. Further refusal results in back to a classification facility for behavior modification.”* This is an area where it is unclear whether staff are complying with IDOC policy. IDOC has told JHA that while there is not supposed to be punishment for refusing to test, people will be treated as if they are positive and isolated for the required quarantine period or until they agree to test, whichever is shorter.

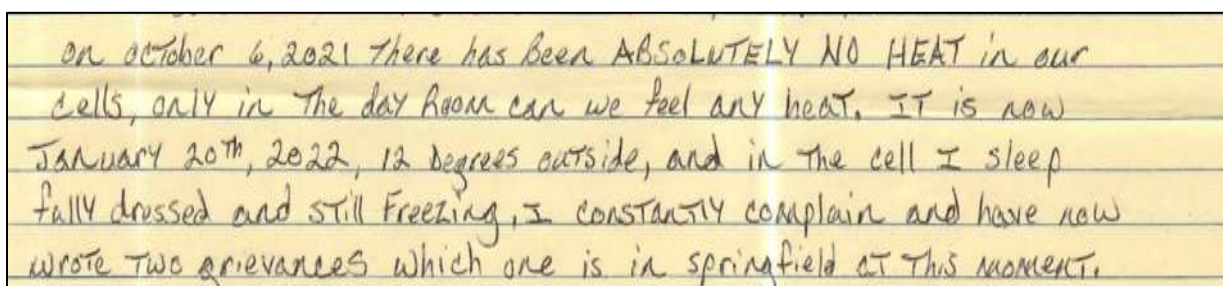
Facility Conditions

As is common, JHA received many letters reporting various facility condition-related concerns from people at different prisons across the state. These reports include descriptions of the experience of being housed in old buildings where mold, ventilation, bug infestations, brown water, and extreme temperatures are regularly reported. In May, JHA published a [statement](#) about the state’s current opportunity to make larger system changes, including closing of prisons and living units that are not fit for habitation. IDOC hired an independent consultant to assess all existing facilities and identify and document the infrastructure needs systemwide; the final report is expected in the fall of 2022.

JHA and other advocate groups are [requesting](#) that the infrastructure assessment and plans for improvement include an in-depth, systemwide analysis of the drinking water and sanitary sewer systems in Illinois prisons as well as needed, comprehensive, and lasting fixes. Concerns about water in IDOC, ranging from reports about observable substances in the water, strange tastes and odors, and fears regarding illness from water have been longstanding issues in several prisons. For

example, in the first half of 2022, JHA again received letters specifically detailing the measures people are taking to attempt to filter the water in their cells at Pontiac. Someone from this facility wrote to JHA in March reporting that people were using cotton from their beds to stuff into the faucets, and another person wrote in April that he was advised by others who are incarcerated to make a water filter out of his sock.

Much of IDOC's prison infrastructure is old, and systems are antiquated and maintenance has been deferred for many years. As a result, reports about the lack of ventilation and extreme temperatures are received by JHA throughout the year.



on October 6, 2021 there has been ABSOLUTELY NO HEAT in our cells, only in The day Room can we feel any heat. IT is now January 20th, 2022, 12 degrees outside, and in The cell I sleep fully dressed and still Freezing, I constantly complain and have now wrote two grievances which one is in Springfield AT THIS MOMENT.

- From someone incarcerated at Sheridan, January 2022

"Incarcerated individuals are in these cell houses where temps reach over 100 degrees and the officers are sitting in a cold air-conditioned room (the bubble). It's so cold inside where they sit that you can't see the Officers and they can't see us due to the windows on the bubble being frosted up. Officers have to keep wiping off the windows so they can pay attention to the dayroom."

- From someone incarcerated at Dixon, June 2022

(NONE DISCIPLINARY). LAWRENCE CORR. CENTER
HAVE NO AIR CONDITIONER FOR US INDIVIDUALS
IN CUSTODY. WE'RE IN THESE UNITS SUFFERING,
SWEATING WHILE DOING NOTHING HEAVY WHILE
THE OFFICERS, C/O'S HAVE AIR CONDITION
WHERE THEY SIT IN AT. IT'S BEEN A HEAT
WAVE OF TEMPERATURES OVER 95° DEGREES,
WEATHER SAYS IT FEELS LIKE 109° DEGREES.
THIS TYPE OF HEAT CAUSE HEAT STROKES
AND OTHER INJURIES. THE HEAT INDEX BEEN
OVER 100° FOR THE PAST FEW DAYS. WE
GET ICE ONCE ON 1ST SHIFT AND ONCE ON
2ND SHIFT. WE CAN'T OPEN THE WINDOWS
DUE TO A HEATWAVE COMING IN.

- From someone incarcerated at Lawrence, June 2022

"House 2 at Robinson CC has had no working air conditioning for around a month now. My son and the other inmates are miserable. As it stands, there will be no relief till they can order a new unit if money permits. IDOC required them last week or so to move the inmates to air-conditioned houses. Nothing is being done. House 1 is broke down for remodel. It has air conditioning but no facilities such as restrooms. My son has health issues of asthma and seizures and he's been having episodes. I hope you can look into this situation. This situation is causing the inmates to be miserable and having behavioral issues."

- From an email about someone incarcerated at Robinson, May 2022

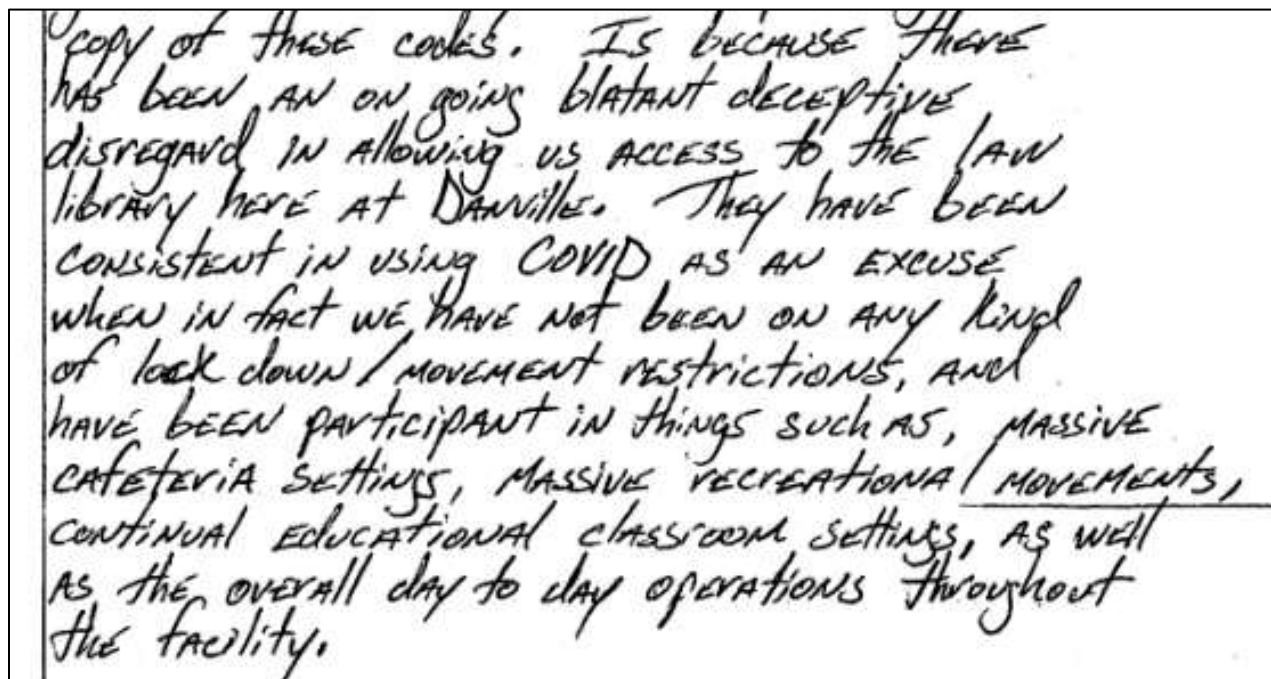
Information Access

People from facilities across the state wrote JHA specifically requesting a copy of IDOC's [Department Rule 504: Discipline and Grievances](#), which has not been recently updated. However,

updates relating to IDOC's Administrative Directive regarding [use of restrictive housing](#) have been made in the past year, and are now available publicly on IDOC's website. JHA continues to hear that people who are incarcerated do not have access to IDOC policies, which may be critical in order to know the standards for discipline that people who are incarcerated are being held to or to adequately grieve a concern. Requests for information access are often accompanied by reports of not being able to access the law library or not being permitted to receive copies. A person wrote JHA from Pinckneyville in April requesting IDOC Administrative Directives and Department Rules and reported the facility has a policy of not permitting law library staff to make copies of the rules.

"We are not allowed to request copies of the Department Rules from our prison libraries and when we ask for a record copy of them from the Freedom of Information Officer at Springfield, they write back refusing to give them to us, telling us they are available in our prison library. There's inmates who have gotten copies of this new 504 rule from people on the outside and when they sent them to the library to get copied the library staff will refuse to copy them, even if we are paying for it."

- From someone incarcerated at Pontiac,
asking for the DR 504 table of maximum penalties, March 2022



A handwritten note enclosed in a black rectangular border. The text is written in cursive and reads: "copy of these codes. Is because there has been an on going blatant deceptive disregard in allowing us access to the law library here at Danville. They have been consistent in using COVID as an excuse when in fact we have not been on any kind of lock down / movement restrictions, and have been participant in things such as, massive cafeteria settings, massive recreational movements, continual educational classroom settings, as well as the overall day to day operations throughout the facility."

- From someone incarcerated at Danville, June 2022

Lack of access to the law library has also resulted in concerns by people who are incarcerated who are seeking to get legal documents copied or notarized.

"I received legal mail which notified me that I had 8 days to file my notice of appeal. I immediately wrote the law library clerk asking to come over and get copies and paperwork notarized. I had my mother call down here to see if there was any way I could get paperwork notarized by another entity due to the fact that the law library has been closed basically since the start of the pandemic. The response from the Wardens Office was that my situation 'is unfortunate.' I don't understand how the institution is basically running at 100% with industry, chow hall, healthcare, school, commissary, barber shop, visiting room, clothing room, plumbers and electricians all being open and operational but the law library is closed."

– From someone incarcerated at Hill, May 2022

"The courts are still operating and we have no way of filing motions properly on our own behalf."

– From someone incarcerated at Graham, February 2022

Another common request of JHA was for access to grievance forms. For example, someone at Shawnee wrote in February 2022: *"They will not give us the proper grievance forms to write/submit a grievance. Any time we put a grievance in their reply is you have to use the grievance form that was updated in 2022. But the only forms they provide us are still 2020."* JHA was advised by IDOC that the 2020 revision is still in use when we raised this issue in February.

Commissary & Food

"These last 20 plus months have definitely taken years off of my life. Prison conditions alone were harsh, but now, IDOC cannot sustain its population."

- From someone incarcerated at Graham, January 2022

For much of 2022, IDOC has been experiencing a commissary disruption connected to contracting and procurement issues that began in 2021. JHA has been tracking the situation and pushing for improvements. In the first half of 2022, JHA's form response letters to people in custody writing us asked questions regarding details about commissary and dietary and we received dozens of letters

further elaborating on the questions answered, and likely increasing this topic as a percentage of issues JHA heard about. These answers provided insight into certain aspects of the commissary shortage and food-related concerns.

In 2022, JHA heard from people reporting that they were not being kept informed about the commissary situation, or that they did not trust the information being given.

“I have a life sentence without parole and have been incarcerated for over 26 years. Inmates in IDOC have always been able to purchase personal hygiene items and clothes at commissary on a regular basis. Since September of 2021 that has drastically changed. I have talked to the warehouse and commissary supervisor, and I have written to the warden here and haven’t received a clear answer as to why there have been severe shortages with commissary other than some vague mention of supply chain issues which is not the real cause.”

- From someone incarcerated at Hill, February 2022

JHA has previously noted in reports and statements that items obtained through commissary are necessities, not luxury items. People wrote to JHA with descriptions of various items they or their loved one deem necessities that had not been available, including dental adhesive, ink for typewriters, and GTL tablet chargers. Many items are necessities related to health and wellbeing, such as over the counter medication, hygiene items, and essential clothing or bedding to accommodate varying seasons and weather changes. JHA received an increase of reports related to access of weather-appropriate, hygienic, and well-fitting clothing and bedding. Several people incarcerated at Jacksonville, in addition to other facilities, wrote to JHA concerned about the quality and quantity of clothing and bedding being provided by the state to people entering first coming into the facility.

“As a porter at the receiving house I have seen them not give new guys but 1 set of blues, 1 pair of socks, 1 white shirt, 1 boxer and nothing to change into. They do not have enough to give out. They also are not giving out toothpaste to the new guys, or toothbrushes nor soap.”

- From someone incarcerated at Jacksonville, April 2022

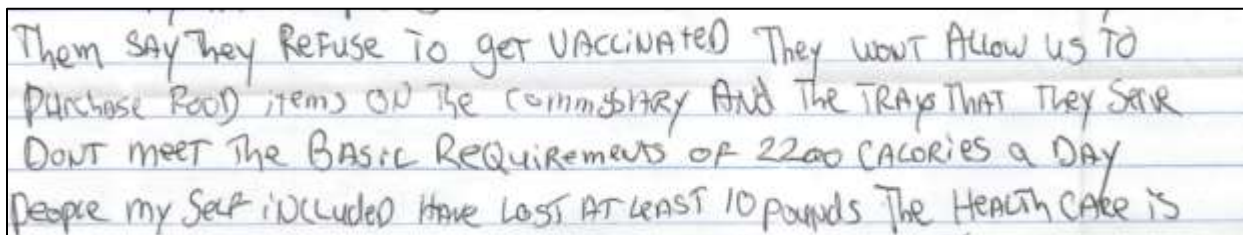
"I still have not been able to buy a pair of shower shoes from commissary, and I've been here 58 days today. Nor have I/we been able to buy any clothing there either. We have our jumpsuit and 2 pairs of underwear provided and 2 pairs of socks (no shirts) yet we can't even buy any at commissary. This is our main issue!"

- From someone incarcerated at Graham Reception & Classification Center, February 2022

People shared reports about food concerns including portion sizes, food being cold and meals not meeting approved nutritional and caloric levels from many different prisons. Reports for time given to eat meals ranged from two to five minutes at Jacksonville, to fifteen minutes at Dixon, with reports from Big Muddy River, Stateville NRC, Vandalia, and Shawnee somewhere in the seven-to-eight-minute range. Times that meals were reportedly served varied across the state, and one person at Shawnee shared he skips breakfast since it's served around 4:00AM, with lunch served around 9:30AM. People wrote JHA with reports about undercooked chicken, spoiled food, and concerns about the sanitation of the kitchen or food trays. JHA also received some reports about slow eat passes and doctor-ordered special diet trays not being honored.

"At the chow hall they are constantly running out of water cups to drink. And the Lts, Sgts, and Officers laugh at us about what we are eating and they say we got 10 minutes to eat starting from when we are called in the housing unit. This means we have to line up and wait for everyone, walk to the chow hall, wait in line to get your tray. So, we get between 3-5 minutes to eat, and don't let them see us eat and talk or we get run out there faster."

- From someone incarcerated in Jacksonville, April 2022

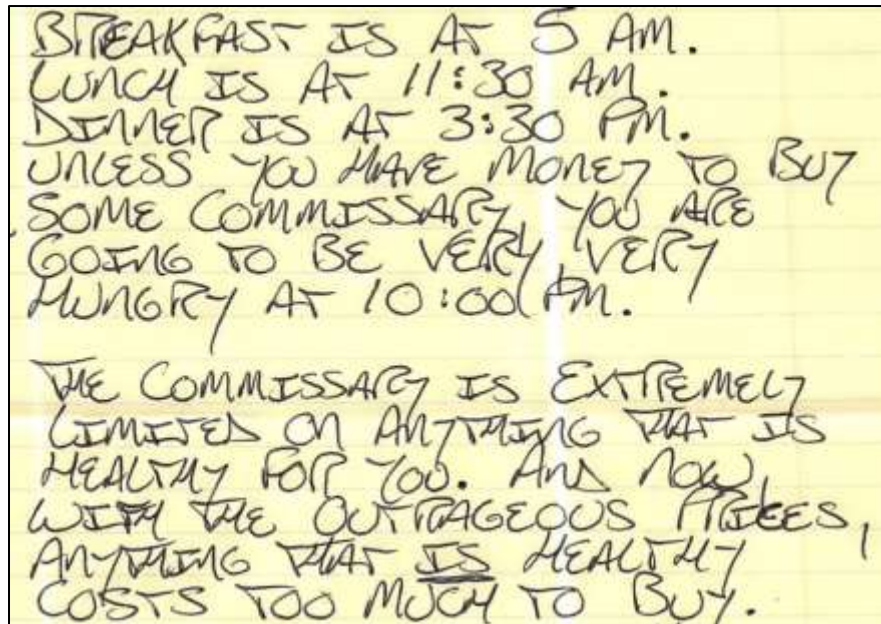


Them say they REFUSE to get VACCINATED They wont Allow us to purchase food items on the commissary AND the TRAYS THAT they SERVE DONT meet the BASIC REQUIREMENTS OF 2200 CALORIES a DAY People my SELF included HAVE LOST AT LEAST 10 pounds The HEALTH CARE IS

- From someone incarcerated at Western, March 2022

“The inmate is not allowed out of cell other than to shower, lost 25 pounds, not allowed to visit loved ones, no commissary allowed, barely no phone calls, they hold mail for 3 weeks before he can get it, food is very bad and not allowing commissary to buy food. He lost 25 pounds surviving off their food. It is like he is in brutal solitary confinement.”

- From an email about someone incarcerated at Stateville NRC, June 2022



BREAKFAST IS AT 5 AM.
LUNCH IS AT 11:30 AM.
DINNER IS AT 3:30 PM.
UNLESS YOU HAVE MONEY TO BUY
SOME COMMISSARY, YOU ARE
GOING TO BE VERY VERY
HUNGRY AT 10:00 AM.

THE COMMISSARY IS EXTREMELY
LIMITED ON ANYTHING THAT IS
HEALTHY FOR YOU. AND NOW,
WITH THE OUTRAGEOUS PRICES,
ANYTHING THAT IS HEALTHY
COSTS TOO MUCH TO BUY.

- From someone incarcerated at Vandalia, May 2022

“For lunch today we had a hot dog with tortillas (corn) instead of bread. For sides we had what is my best guess approximately 1/3 cup mashed potatoes, 1/3 cup diced peaches, 1/3 cup peas. Supper around 4pm. The food tastes good, but the portions are like grade school. I’m not confident we even get 1,500 calories a day. Most us exercise and need more so we don’t go to bed hungry. You know, hungry leads to hangry which isn’t good in prison. Full people are happier which equals less fighting, less depression, and just being more productive. As far as time most of us can barely choke the food down before they call it. I mean 5 minutes tops.”

- From someone incarcerated at Shawnee, June 2022

10 minutes: it's enough time to eat.
The portions aren't enough for a grown man,
a toddler can't get full off of the portions
of food Dixon C.C. serves incarcerated individuals.
Food staff have the dietary workers put the
main meal in the small squares of the trays
when it's something good to eat where every
incarcerated individual will be coming out
of their cell houses to eat in the chow hall.
The food be like warm because they prepare
lunch @ 9am in the morning they prepare
dinner @ 12pm

- From someone incarcerated at Dixon, June 2022

Medical Concerns

"Medical is barely hanging on by a thread"

- From someone incarcerated at Logan, May 2022

JHA received approximately 100 reports related to medical concerns in the first half of 2022 including reports of understaffing of medical staff (nurses, doctors, and dentists); denial of necessary services (many people attributing this to healthcare contractor Wexford); lack of follow up for outside doctor visits or prescriptions; unresponsiveness to medical requests and medical-related grievances; inconsistent distribution of, or unavailability of requested/required medication; lack of mental health services; and lack of COVID prevention or medical treatment.

"This is an emergency. I am an inmate at Logan Correctional Center. The health care unit do not have a doctor here. Dr. [redacted] quit, and so did half of the staff none of the nursing staff and nurse practitioners can diagnose a blood clot, which I have."

- From someone incarcerated at Logan, March 2022

"Living the life of an individual in custody at the age of 65 with medical issues under the care of a broken system, from my experience you are dead meat. No one cares,

not nurses or doctors, they are understaffed with inexperienced people. I have kidney disease stage 3 and also heart failure. I didn't have these illnesses when I arrived here at Illinois River 15 years ago. I sit here in fear of my life not because of the prison inmates but because of the medical. I'm not just speaking for me but for elderly inmates who cried for help but didn't make it. I also speak for those who are afraid to come forward because of retaliation and punishment they may face."

- From someone incarcerated at Illinois River, March 2022

Additionally, JHA continued to receive reports with concerns about COVID prevention and treatment from facilities across the state including from people who are incarcerated who reported that they had not been able to receive COVID boosters. According to letters from May from several different women incarcerated at Logan, COVID booster shots were originally planned to be offered in October, but had not yet been provided. A person incarcerated at Pinckneyville wrote to JHA in March explaining that he filed an emergency grievance in December 2021 requesting his booster vaccine, but his grievance was not answered until March 2022. In the meantime, he received the booster in February, but not until after contracting COVID in January

06 We are still waiting for covid boosters. I have never been told so many lies. My house never received our boosters for they lost our list of names. We have now filled out three more forms with 90-100 names, all lost. We have grieved only to have most grievances lost and not even given back to us. Nurses say, we can not order without health care director, then they give us dates we will get boosters and never get them. Then the nurses who know covid is all over the prison. again now say you dont need a booster covid is back, or I'm not getting shot why are you.

- From someone over 65 years of age incarcerated at Logan, May 2022

Some people had concerns that prisons were generally only testing people who have refused vaccines, leaving open the possibility that others who are COVID positive are going undetected and exposing others. People from various facilities continued to report concerns about the lack of treatment and privileges available for those who test positive for COVID.

"Treating COVID positive inmates does not mean shutting them in a housing unit in hopes they all recover in a 14-day period, this is the definition of cruel and unusual punishment."

- From someone incarcerated at Graham, March 2022

"We seem to be punished whenever we test positive for COVID. We're basically put into segregation, while officers are given what is in a sense a 2-week vacation with full pay. With this being the case officers encourage us, and each other to contract the virus."

- From someone incarcerated at Danville, February 2022



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

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.

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 all the persons who agreed to be interviewed for this report and who graciously shared their experiences and insights with us.



The John Howard Association was the proud recipient of the 2015 MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions