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**Communications  
Report**



**Your Words Matter:  
JHA Quarterly  
Communications  
Summary**  
*April - June 2023*

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# Introduction

Between April and June of 2023, JHA fielded 483 communications. This included 277 letters from individuals incarcerated in the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) or in out-of-state, Illinois county, federal, or other kinds of custodial facilities; 83 phone calls, and 123 emails from people in the community. This does not include all communications coming into JHA, such as Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) reports, referral outreach, and those from people with whom we have repeated or ongoing communications throughout a period of time. This report aims to provide an overview of the most widely shared concerns and issues people communicated to JHA this quarter regarding their incarceration.

At JHA, we strongly believe that any reform and system change within our prison system must be grounded in a comprehensive understanding of its current realities. To achieve this, we adopt a proactive approach, actively engaging with prison environments through onsite observations, data collection, and interviews with both incarcerated individuals and staff. Additionally, we maintain an ongoing flow of information by receiving privileged mail from incarcerated individuals. This allows us to stay attuned to the evolving needs and concerns within Illinois' prisons. To bolster our efforts, we initiated a new survey in IDOC prisons during the summer of 2022, and we have been actively administering it throughout the year. As of April 2023, the survey had been distributed at every secure IDOC facility with the hopes that incarcerated individuals have other avenues for their voices to be heard. While surveys now make up a considerable amount of the information coming into our office, information from these will be [separately reported](#), and review and analysis is ongoing.

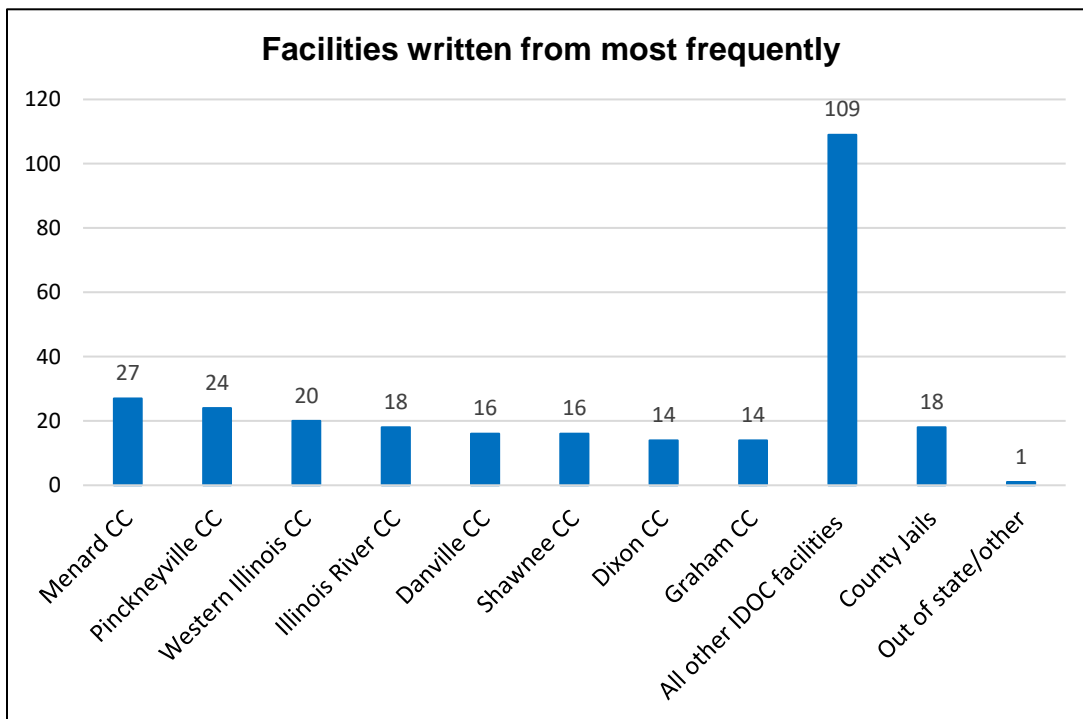
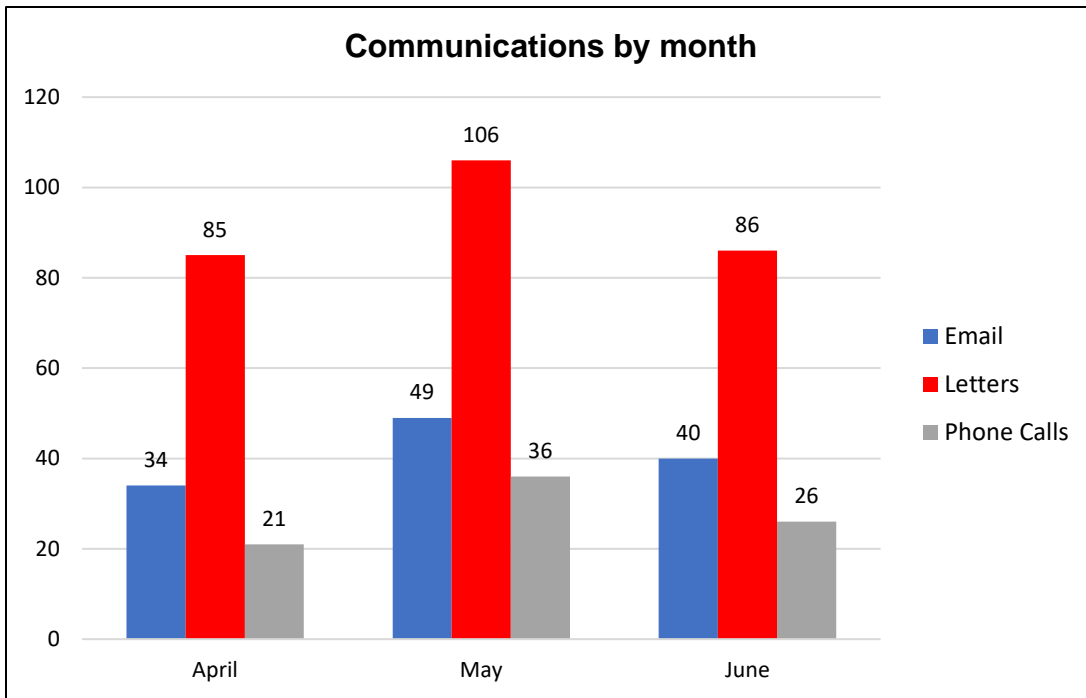
The experiences shared by incarcerated individuals drive our priorities and advocacy efforts. JHA does not have the authority to investigate issues inside prisons and cannot independently verify all the information provided. We also note that issues and practices can vary widely over time and across the state. JHA's communications summaries issued on a quarterly basis are an anecdotal resource to promote transparency within the system and raise awareness of the challenges faced by those living and working in Illinois' prisons.

Please check back each quarter to learn more about ongoing and emerging issues, concerns, changes to policies and practices, and efforts to reform our carceral system into one that is rehabilitative, less populous, and humane. [You can find our previous quarterly report here.](#)

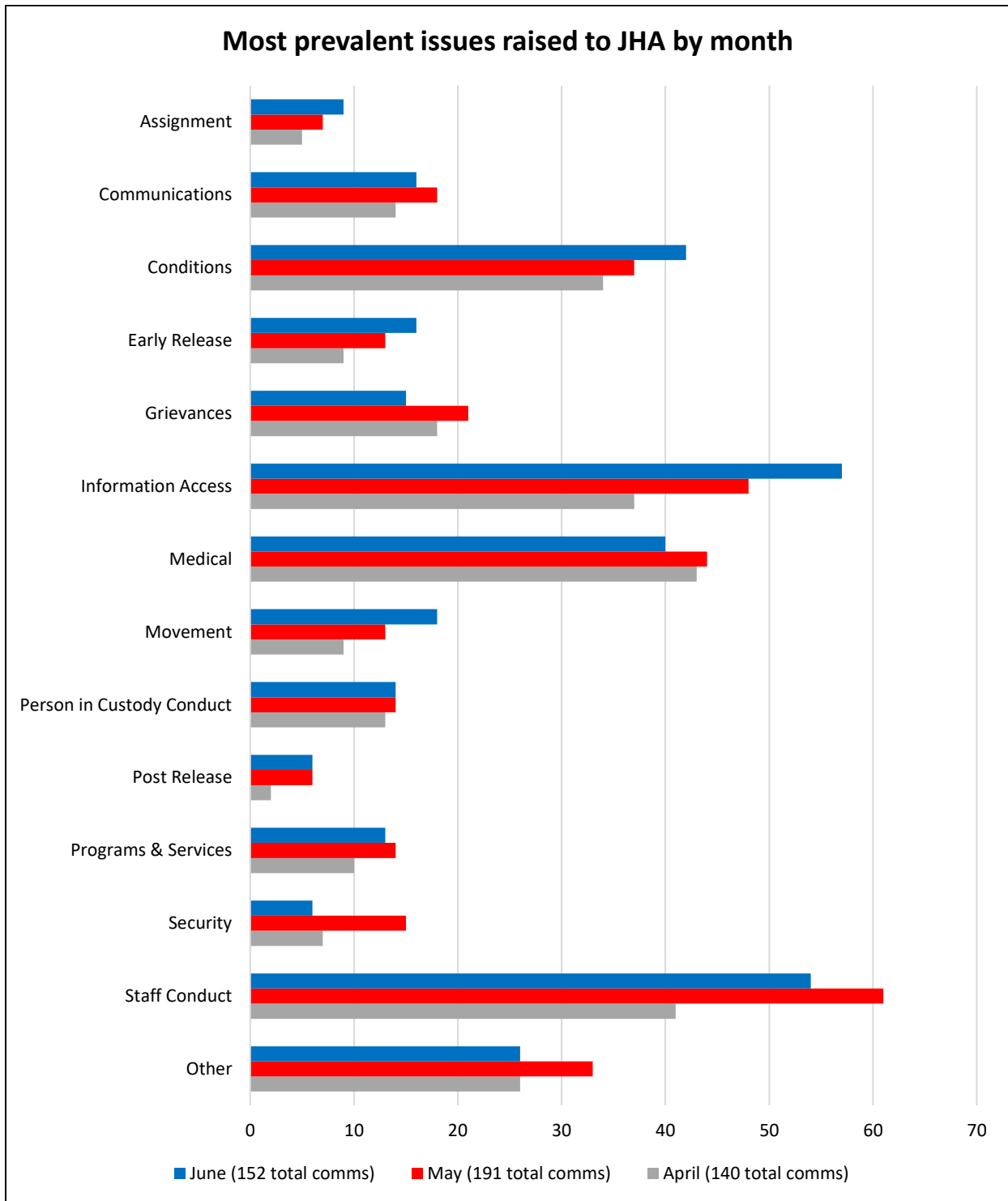
**JHA is grateful to everyone who shares their experiences, perceptions, and insight into what is happening inside our prisons.**

**Your words matter.**

# Summary Charts



The following chart shows the number of communications in which each issue was raised to JHA each month. Note that more than one issue could be raised per communication.



# Information Access

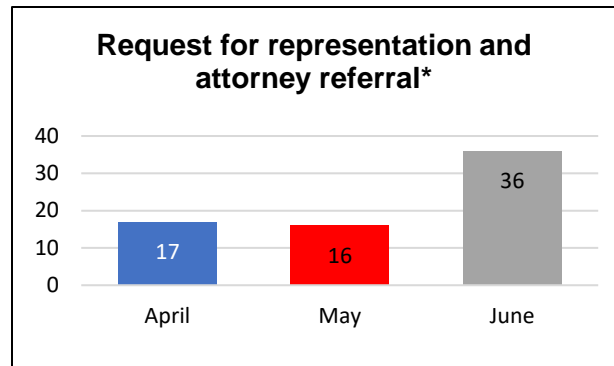
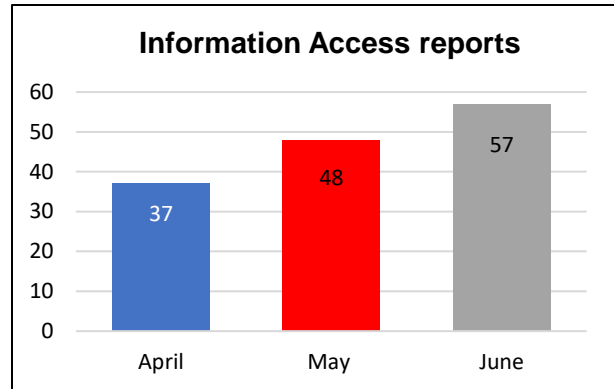
During this quarter, one of the main issues raised by incarcerated individuals in IDOC was limited access to information. Requests for information increased from 37 in April to 57 in June, with a surge of requests for legal representation and attorney referrals in the month of June. Of all communications received, approximately 30% were related to access to information.

The information sought varies and typically includes requests for legal resources, updates on current events and changes in laws, details about their legal case or sentence, prison reports, and/or IDOC policies. Access to this information varied based on individual

circumstances, including the type of facility and housing status. People in IDOC shared with

JHA that they encountered challenges obtaining information, especially that related to legislative changes affecting their sentencing, current IDOC policies, and case-specific legal materials, often due to the limitations of their prison's law library. Limited access to legal information and assistance remains a problem for people in IDOC; without dedicated resources to provide this support, people are not fully informed of their rights and are hindered in their ability to exercise them.

Many IDOC policies are now publicly available to those outside of prison on its [website](#). **JHA continues to request that additional policies be added to the IDOC website**



**“I’m writing to ask for a list of lawyers that handles IDOC cases of wrongful doing within the prisons if you do not mind”**

*– Individual in custody at Pinckneyville*

*\*This table is a sub-issue within information access*

and for people to have access to policies within prisons. Based on JHA's review, as of July, 2023, 390 policies were available on IDOC's website.

#1 CAN you obtain A complete copy of that water Test Report that was taken sometime in 2022 At Dixon C.C. AND send me A copy of that report please?

- Individual in Custody at Dixon

here, stomach ache, bad heaches, we donet go to law library in person, Please Help Please redy soon.

- Individual in Custody at Pontiac

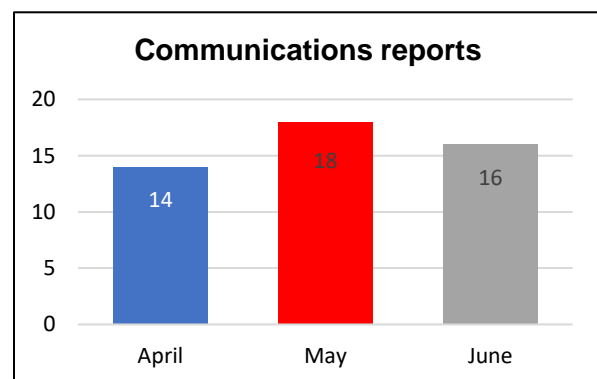
In addition to requesting access to lawyers, legal forms and/or the courts, some people contact JHA about our facility-based monitoring reports, often for the facility in which they are incarcerated. JHA has asked that our reports be made available inside the prisons for people to review.

Re: I'm requesting a copy of the latest "Monitoring Report" of Western Illinois Correctional Center. It can be whatever year you have.

- Individual in Custody at Western Illinois

## Communications

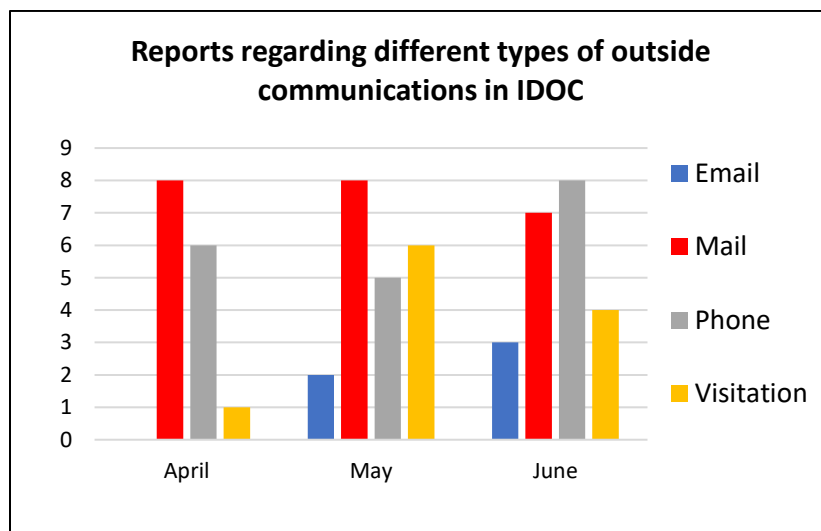
Issues with outside communications in Illinois prisons include concerns about incarcerated individuals' access to their families, legal representation, and support networks. Restrictions on phone calls, mail, e-messages (referred to as email in chart), and visitation can lead to feelings of isolation and frustration, and hurt the process of family reunification and





support building. Additionally, limited availability to call loved ones and to secure visitation slots present an emotional burden on both incarcerated individuals and their loved ones.

For example, one individual in Centralia reported that *“some inmates dominate the phones, passing to their buddies and back to them so others have trouble getting a call home! More staff control is needed and pin numbers are needed to lock 1 hour after each call so they can’t redial so soon.”* Finding a balance between security measures and preserving vital connections is essential for the wellbeing of those incarcerated and for potential reentry into their communities.

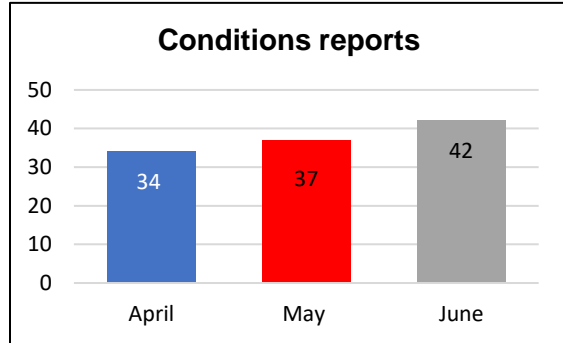


I have been continuously harassed as retribution for the grievances I filed against the mailroom. I've had mail "lost" incoming and outgoing, damaged, delayed, and confiscated or destroyed without filing any of the appropriate paperwork. She has recently written me three tickets and confiscated outgoing mail without any notifications other than a ticket. Despite the numerous

- Individual in Custody at Big Muddy River

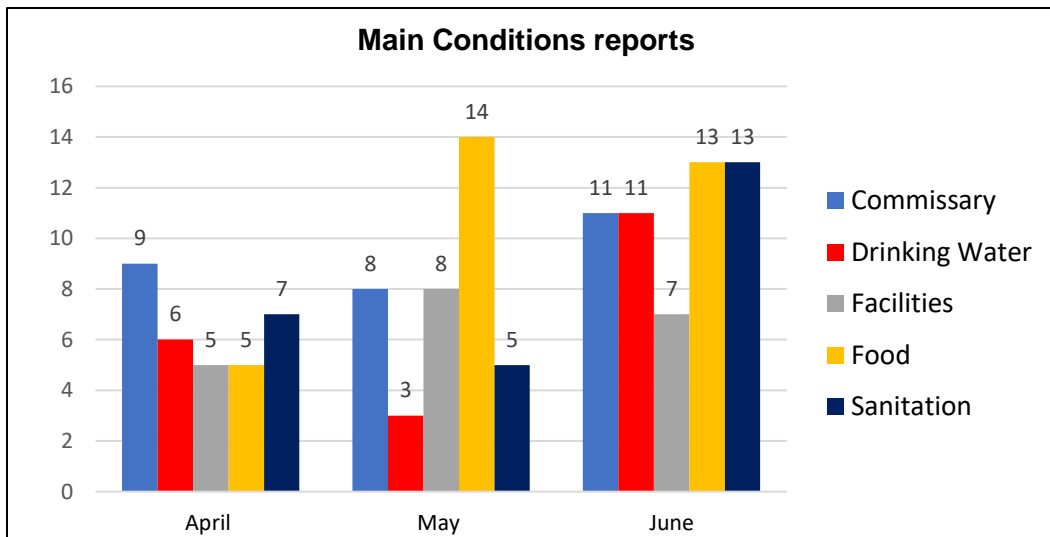
# Conditions

JHA has consistently received concerns about the physical conditions and other condition-related issues in various prisons across the state. Examples of related issues include commissary, food, water, clothing, bedding, ventilation, and more. A considerable portion of IDOC's prison infrastructure is outdated with antiquated



systems, and maintenance has been neglected for a significant period. Consequently, reports often describe the challenging experience of residing in buildings plagued by issues such as mold, inadequate ventilation, pest infestations, and extreme temperature fluctuations. These issues are communicated to JHA throughout the year.

JHA further categorizes living condition concerns by sub-categories, which include issues such as food and commissary, drinking water, and facility infrastructure conditions and cleanliness.



JHA continues to hear concerns about physical conditions, cleanliness, and ventilation.

received my grievance regarding the germed lint and the Rust'n Air vents in the shower area and they claim to have made an attempt to eliminate the lint issue but there's still much more to be cleaned within these Air vents within all the Housing Units. The Cafeteria has a germed lint ceiling that's dark black on the tiles of the ceiling by the Air vents. The Cameras will show

- Individual in Custody at Jacksonville

of my main concerns is that the ventilation system is always being shut off and not turned on for weeks/months at a time. It gets so humid and stuffy in here. But my concerns are that there is no fresh air exchange or nothing is being expelled from the building like dust, fical particles floating in the air along with the carbon monoxide we breath out. There has to be some kind of city ordinance against this. We need fresh air exchange for many

- Individual in Custody at Jacksonville

In addition, concerns relating to water and plumbing issues remained common.

~~BLACK MULL~~  
LIVING CONDITIONS (SINK DOESN'T DRAIN & SMELLS LIKE SULFUR), STAFF MISCONDUCT WITH RETALIATORY ACTS (ACTIONS) TOWARDS INDIVIDUALS IN CUSTODY (BOOKS FOR RAISE MADE

- Individual in Custody at Stateville

PER WEEK, DYSFUNCTIONAL ELECTRICAL AND PLUMBING IN CELLS (LEAKAGE), DELAYS IN BASICALLY EVERYTHING EXCEPT FOR WRITING TICKETS AND NOT GIVING A DAMN ABOUT THE MENTAL AND MEDICAL HEALTH STATUS OF US

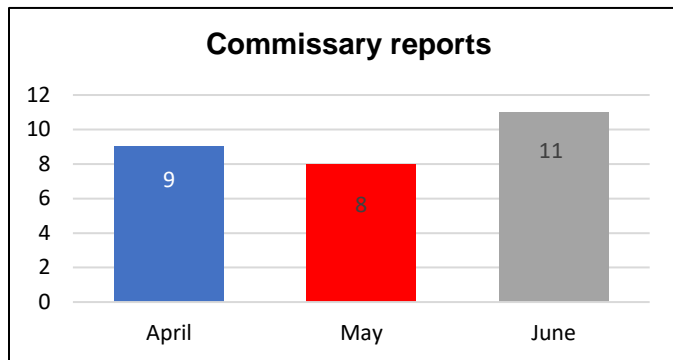
- Individual in Custody at Menard

Importantly, a report authored by the independent consulting group CGL assessing the physical infrastructure issues in the Illinois prison system was made public during this quarter. This report underscores and lays out the cost to address many of the concerns shared with JHA by people who are incarcerated about the physical conditions they experience in the prisons. [JHA has made this report available on our website](#), and believes it is critical to both informing stakeholders about the unsafe, inhumane, and decrepit conditions that exist in many Illinois prisons and making decisions to protect the safety and wellbeing of those who live and work in our correctional system.

## Commissary

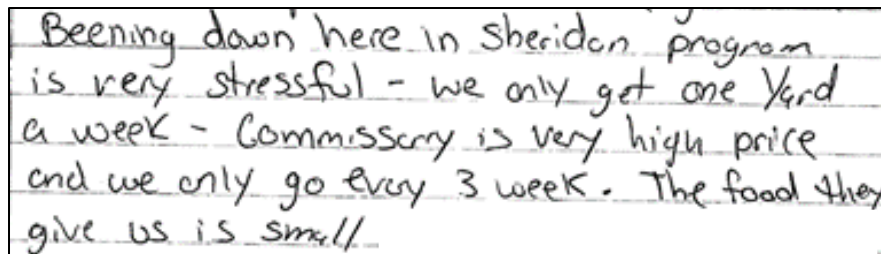
Commissary in Illinois prisons is a vital resource, offering hygiene items, materials to write letters, supplemental clothing items and food, and other important essentials not provided by the facility. Item availability due to ongoing issues around contracting with commissary providers and spending

limits may vary facility by facility, however, JHA continues to hear commissary issues remain a significant concern. As one individual noted in Centralia that they *“only have one option for coffee, it costs \$1.35 for a 4oz bag! Obviously at this price it tastes awful! But it is our only option! We are not allowed any other option, and are told by officials that Springfield will not allow them to order or sell any products”*.



**“It seems like they can never get enough officers to work here, also teachers. But this letter is about security officers and when they are shorthanded and need someone to fill in on a spot, they pull the personal property officer, and it would take weeks or more to get our electronic that we bought of commissary”**

*- Individual in Custody at Big Muddy River*



Beening down here in Sheridan program is very stressful - we only get one yard a week - Commissary is very high price and we only go every 3 week. The food they give us is small.

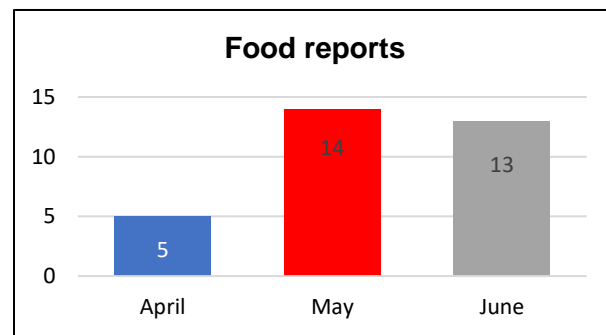
*- Individual in Custody at Sheridan*

## Food

Food concerns are another issue that threatens the wellbeing and health of incarcerated individuals in Illinois prisons.

We receive reports about the poor quality of food being given, which has been communicated to us as “inedible” or “spoiled and rotten” due to poor food safety

protocols. We’ve also noted instances where individuals mention the inadequate portion sizes, leaving people hungry after their meals. Additionally, dietary restrictions, cultural, and religious considerations are not often granted for individuals in custody.





am a Muslim of Hispanic Descent. I have an approved Religious Diet "HALAL" signed by the Chaplain and Warden here at Lincoln CC. However I am not receiving my HALAL Diet meals. Dietary Food Manager continues to give me and the other Muslims a "Kosher" Diet tray. However even the Kosher Diet tray is not properly prepared or is it meeting the Kosher Diet Menu. I've started receiving a tray of Lettuce tomatoes and beats for lunch and dinner. I've filed grievances, requests, etc. to no avail. I

- Individual in Custody at Lincoln

Becomes undrinkable water Inmates Not Been Fed Enough They Give Inmates Baby Size Portion of Food For Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner And They Throw whats left of

- Individual in Custody at Western

it. So this was his way of intimidating me. The Kitchen in this facility is sickening. The line that holds the pans to serve food has no heat source, so we are served Luke-warm food which could result in food-poisoning. Rats have built a nest inside the line and can be seen playing behind it and under it. Trays that are brought to the units are done so on bread racks instead of a Hot-Box. I know because I work in the Kitchen. Inmates are dissuaded from Grievancing this

- Individual in Custody at Shawnee

## Extreme Temperatures

Extreme temperatures in Illinois prisons pose significant challenges for people who are incarcerated as well as staff. During scorching summers, the lack of air conditioning can lead to health risks and discomfort. Conversely, freezing winters without sufficient heating, clothing, or bedding can jeopardize wellbeing. Such conditions raise concerns about the humane treatment of people who are incarcerated and highlight the need to address these issues to ensure safety. One individual at Western wrote that *"when the weather is cold, the powers that be purposely turn off the heat and turn on the air conditioner and the inmate are forced to deal with*

*being very cold. They turn off the boiler or turn down the boiler so that when the inmates are in the shower the water is cold.”*

JHA has received several reports regarding inadequacy of fans sold on commissary for combatting heat.

more. All so we need to start having our big 8 inch fans back because these 6 inch fans are NOT going to last or work in the HOI summer months and they keep braking After a month or so and now we have to buy another NEW fan. They keep disrespecting us by talking

- Individual in Custody at Pinckneyville

## Water Supply

JHA received complaints about water in IDOC, ranging from reports about observable substances or discoloration in the water to strange tastes and/or odors. Fears regarding illness from water have also been longstanding issues in several prisons. **JHA continues to work with the prison water coalition to identify new violations, make them publicly known, and push for the IEPA and IDOC to inspect, repair, and replace water and sewage systems in facilities where environmental standards have been violated. We also continue to advocate for the health of incarcerated people along with our partners in the field of environmental justice.**

I writting you cause the water up hear has a bad taste to it and I have talked to other inmates and they said the same thing, you all need to investigate the facility water supply cause to many inmate are having the same symptoms and nobody knows what the problems are coming from but the water. The three meals a day are

- Individual in Custody at Pinckneyville

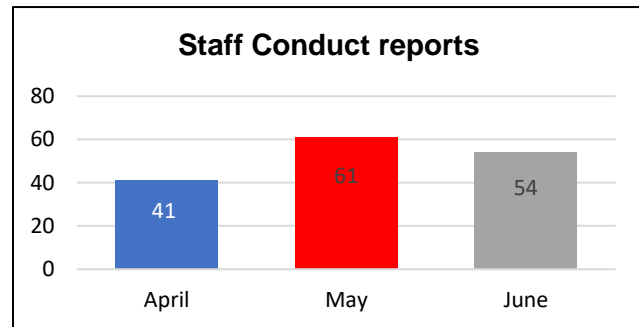
I'm writing you to inform you of the on-going issue with our water, if possible can you keep track of this

- Individual in Custody at Robinson

## Staff Conduct

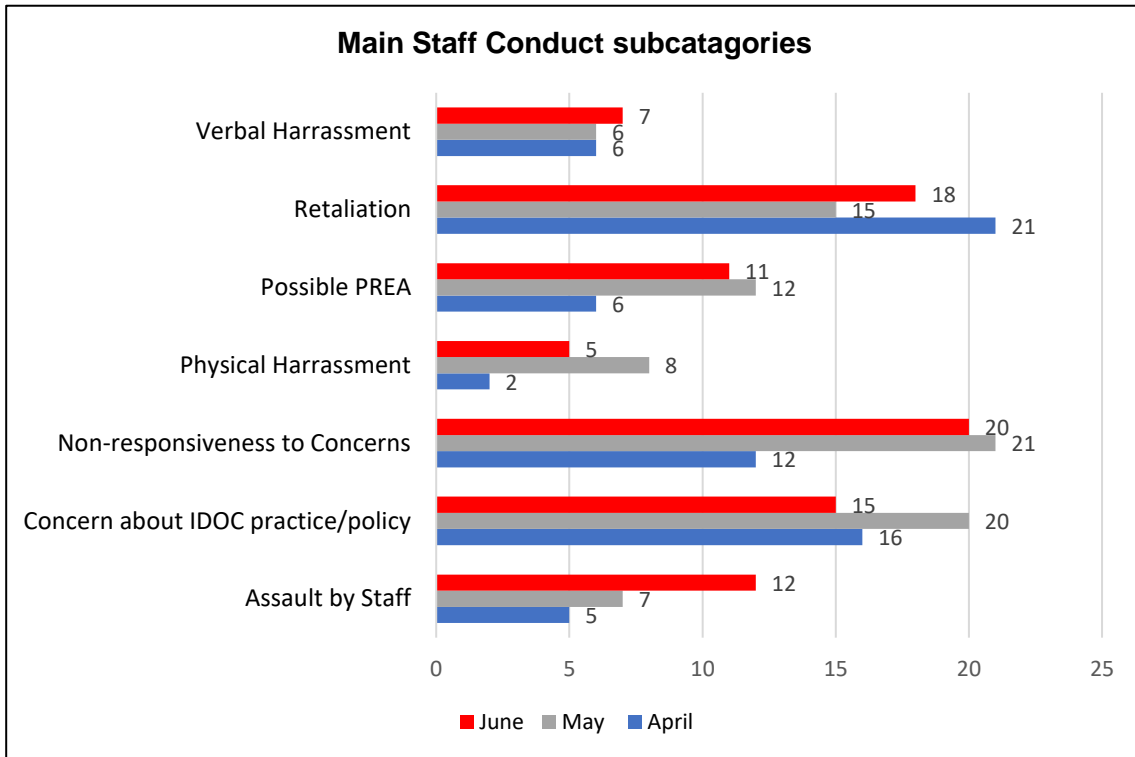
JHA receives regular reports about issues relating to staff, a category which covers a wide range of topics and behaviors demonstrated by the people who work in IDOC and the experiences and perceptions of the people who are incarcerated. People who write to JHA share their concerns

about verbal harassment, retaliation, physical assault and other ways in which staff conduct is problematic. Additionally, people write about lack of staff responsiveness or issues with lack of staffing.



JHA categories these concerns under the main heading of Staff Conduct and then identifies and tracks specific reports under the following subheadings: verbal harassment, retaliation, possible PREA, physical harassment, ignored concerns, concern about IDOC policy, and assault by staff. As an organization, we attempt to separate out concerns related to the actions and behavior of individual staff that fall outside of IDOC protocol from those that are a critique of IDOC policy and practices. One individual noted in Vandalia, *"I'm constantly being riddled with snide comments, insults and ridiculed and even propositioned...I didn't know the repercussions of C/O publicly outing me as gay would affect me so much"*.





I'm writing you now to alert you to a aggressive action being enacted in Centralia Correctional Center. The "Tactical Teams" have been shaking down the Prison, nothing new there, but they are also using Prolonged Stress Positions on the incarcerated in the form of overly tight hushcotes and cuffing us with our Palm facing out behind our

- Individual in Custody at Centralia

WITH THAT SAID I STILL FIND IT VERY DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT IT IS OK FOR OFFICERS TO TELL MEN HERE TO "SHUT THE FUCK UP" FOR SIMPLY ASKING QUESTIONS. I HAVE BEEN HERE FOR JUST OVER 6 WEEKS AND HAVE WITNESSED SOME EXTREMELY INHUMANE TREATMENT THAT GOES OVERLOOKED BY THE ENTIRE ADMINISTRATION.

- Individual in Custody at Lincoln

These security staff, everyone who works in this prison and outside this prison who are all about the mistreatment of incarcerated people and esp. Blacks and Latinos. They consider whites as Superior and blatantly call us "and Spicks". They hired a Black warden in order to throw this up off. But we never see this dude. They're bias, very bias.

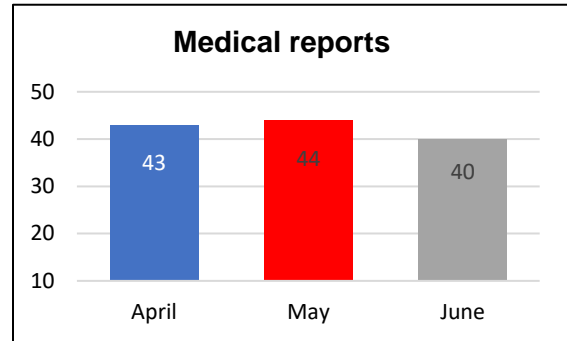
- Individual in Custody at Menard

The most. The way I'm spoken to with such disrespect & rudeness in comparison to the other inmates. The way I'm given harsh disciplinary actions for doing the same infractions or even less severe actions. The way I've had

- Individual in Custody at Logan

# Medical

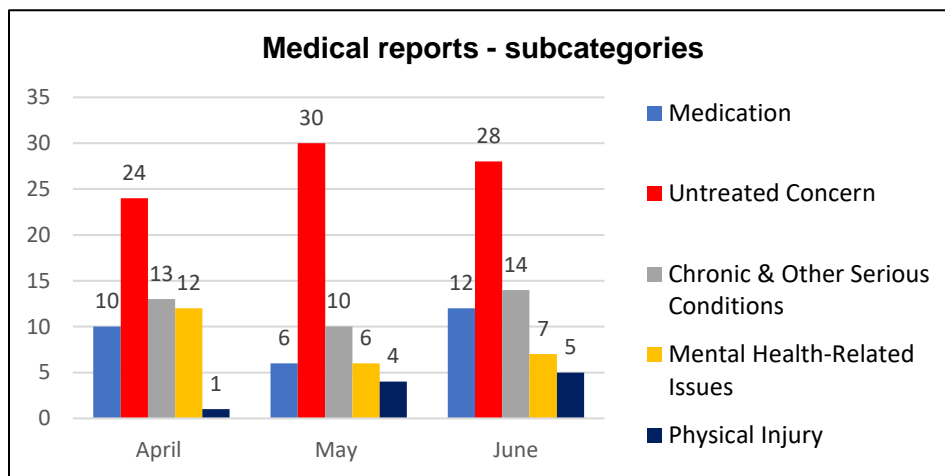
People incarcerated in IDOC continue to share with JHA that medical care is a major issue for them both in terms of accessing care as well as regarding the quality of care they receive. Of all communications received for this quarter, 26% of communications received were medical concerns.



AS A medical professional on numerous patients under his care. one person died, and two people had to be rushed to an off-site medical facility. And the medical staff joke and laugh in our faces. If i hear one more time "it's the shawnee way, have A shawnee day" ... my health will be the least of my worries.

- Individual in Custody at Shawnee

JHA categories Medical Concerns in subcategories: medication, untreated concerns, chronic and other serious conditions, mental health-related issues, and physical injury.



Another individual wrote to us from Pinckneyville that he's *"never once seen a tele psych or mental health since I've been here. I haven't received my mental health medicine in almost*

a month and a half. I feel I'm being neglected of my mental health treatment and my civil rights are being abused.”

THE HEALTH CARE IS A BIG MESS, THEY ARE SHORT NURSES, GET MEDS ON TIME DOES NOT HAPPEN, SOMETIMES ITS A WEEK TO 3 WEEKS, OFFICERS, SGT'S, LT'S TELL US TO SHUT THE F - UP, FOUR LETTER WORD, I DO NOT LIKE

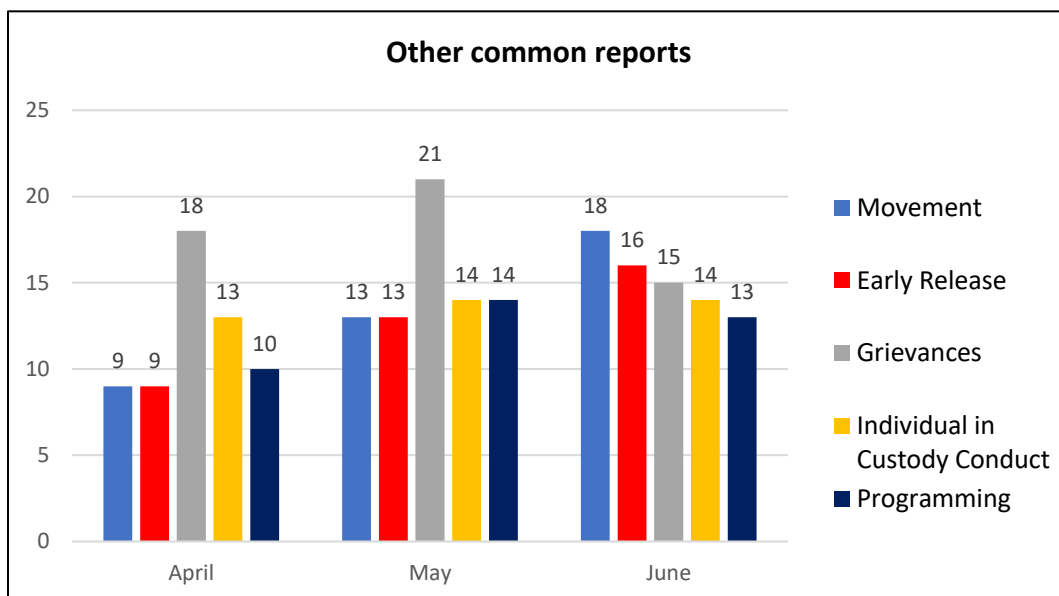
- Individual in Custody at Big Muddy

ALL THE WAITLISTS FOR THE MOST BASIC OF HUMAN NEEDS SUCH AS EYE APPTS, AND DENTAL EXAMS ARE OVER 6 MONTHS

- Individual in Custody at Lincoln

## Other Issues

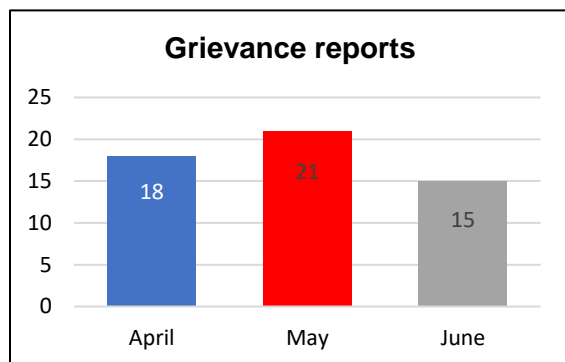
Other issues we continued to commonly hear about from the incarcerated population include movement, early release, grievances, concerns regarding other incarcerated individuals' conduct, and programming. Below is a breakdown of the frequency with which we heard from people about each of these issues.



## Grievances

The IDOC grievance system is meant to provide incarcerated individuals with an avenue with which to voice complaints and receive a response. We have received reports of grievances being denied, staff not responding to grievances, grievances not being received or acknowledged by staff, and even the complete unavailability of grievance forms. [Section 504.830 of Title 20](#) states that “grievances shall be reviewed and a written response provided to the offender,” though many grievances are reported to not get responses. Incarcerated individuals also per the grievance rule *may be* allowed the “opportunity to appear before the Grievance Officer unless the grievance is deemed without merit.” When grievances go missing or are made unavailable, incarcerated individuals are denied their right to resolution. Grievances including “discrimination based on disability” or accommodation requests are expected to be forwarded to the facility ADA coordinator for further investigation. Many copies of grievances we receive regard the denial of medical treatment or disability accommodation. Lastly, people in custody are impeded in their civil right to sue when they are unable to exhaust administrative remedies prior to filing a lawsuit under the federal Prison Litigation Reform Act (PLRA) by being unable to comply with state grievance procedures.

We heard from an incarcerated individual at Lincoln that *“None of my grievances have been taken seriously. For instance, the leaking toilet. It has been leaking for months. Yet somehow they simply ignore it...IDOC and Lincoln CC in specific, has failed to do the right thing over and over.”* Meanwhile, someone at Graham wrote that *“in the penitentiary, we*



**“I have been continuously harassed as retribution for the grievances I filed against the mail room. I’ve had mail “lost” incoming and outgoing, damaged, delayed, and confiscated or destroyed without filing any of the appropriate paperwork.” -**

*Individual in Custody at Big Muddy*

have no voice. The grievance process is moot because they are all awesome employees C.O's, counselors, etc.. Groups such as yours are our voice. I am imploring you to be that voice. If they are continued to be allowed to get away with minute violations and have those violations and liberties, they take will only grow in proportion."

I have wrote 4 Grievance's that WAS All Decided Emergen  
cy And Still havent Been Seen when Menard Has A Medical  
Bill of Rights i) you have the Right to be treated with Consider  
ation and dignity which they Dont do, I have Be Denied  
Mental health care I Asked for A Crisis team And Both

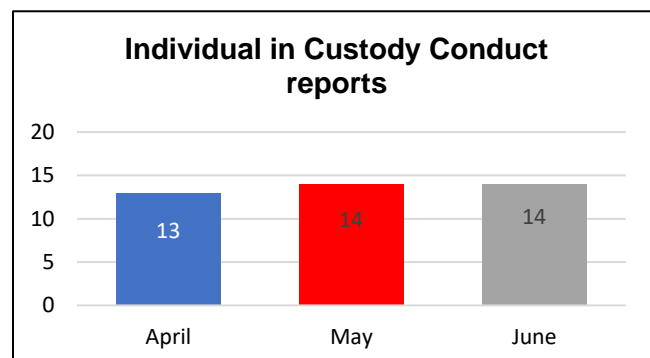
- Individual in Custody at Menard

Based on what is shared with JHA, many people report having little faith in the grievance system. IDOC reports that efforts are underway to reform the current grievance system; JHA has seen job postings for the newly created position of regional grievance officer for IDOC.

**From what JHA hears and has observed, the grievance system continues to be ineffective for people who are incarcerated. Individuals routinely report lack of trust in the process, lack of or inconsistent responses to grievances, fear of retaliation, and an inability to utilize the system independent of correctional staff involvement. Accurate and publicly reported grievance data is also needed.**

## Individual in Custody Conduct

Addressing and managing issues involving individual in custody conduct remains essential to ensuring a safe and secure environment for both people who are incarcerated and staff. JHA sometimes hears that staff are not helpful with issues between incarcerated individuals.





another inmate before the assault I had informed  
 the staff of the threat against me + also witnessed  
 one of the inmates get in my face threatening me  
 but did nothing violating my 8th amendment with  
 deliberate indifference when I asked for help  
 asking me if it was because of what I was in here  
 for and if they had found out I said yes.

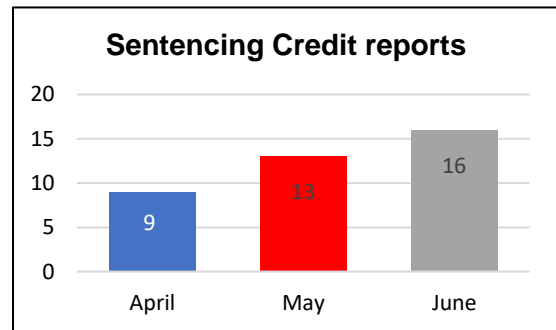
- Individual in Custody at Graham

while being housed in protective custody on account  
 of threats from a certain "gang" here at menard. I WAS  
 Attacked And brutally beaten to with an inch of my life  
 I suffered a broken nose 2 large cuts on my eyebrow, A  
 concussion (as I was in and out of consciousness for several hours)  
 and I now require a prescription in my right eye.  
 The grievance was much more detailed I am simply trying  
 not to bore you.

- Individual in Custody at Menard

## Sentencing Credit

People in IDOC have shared their concerns with JHA about the lack of accurate tracking and administration of sentence credits, leading to delays in early release. This problem not only affects morale and hinders rehabilitation efforts, but it also creates additional burdens for prison administrators and increases the expense of the prison system for Illinois taxpayers. Addressing the tracking, administration, application, and reporting of sentence credits is crucial to ensure a fair and efficient process for incentivizing and utilizing the credits to everyone's benefit. Many people report being told they are denied sentencing credit based on criminal history, which is a factor beyond their control and which cannot be affected by good behavior.



I was told I had been denied the 1 year E.D.S.C. because of my criminal background, but had been submitted before any of the work assignment or vocational E.P.S.C. contracts had been completed.

It is to my understanding that the 1 year E.D.S.C. is based on good conduct and performance effort made by the inmate, I've worked hard to obtain the E.P.S.C. I've been awarded and I have no tickets on my record from to current date for this time period and present incarceration term.

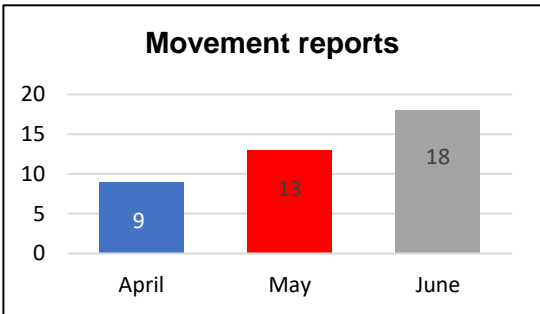
- Individual in Custody at Jacksonville

They have been targeting certain individuals in custody with these disciplinary reports filled with false allegations which don't allow most of us an opportunity to receive "Earned Discretionary Sentence Credits" (EDSC). I am a victim of receiving these infractions "minor and major" that are filled with false accusations even when there are camera footage that will exonerate me and also show that these infractions are fabricated by the staff here at this facility...

- Individual in Custody at Illinois River

## Movement

Movement concerns are another issue that we commonly hear about from individuals in custody, describing the inability to spend time out of their cells or sleeping areas. Movement can be stifled due to short staffing, COVID, or other safety concerns.



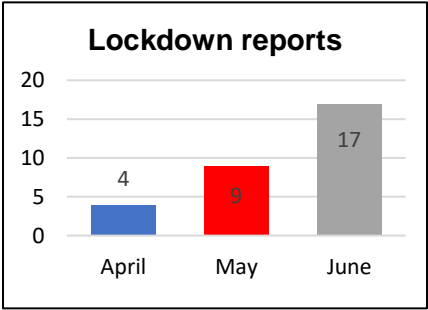


IS GOING ON. THIS MONTH HAS BEEN A ROUGH MONTH FOR INMATES. THE C.O'S ARE TRYING TO RE-NEW THERE CONTRACT FOR MORE MONEY, MORE PAID DAYS OFF, AND A BETTER AND SAFER WORK ENVIRONMENT, I DONT KNOW HOW THAT WILL EVER HAPPEN, BUT AS OF RIGHT NOW I KNOW THEY HAVEN'T GOTTEN WHAT THEY HAVE ASKED FOR SO NOW C.O'S ARE CALLING IN WHICH CAUSES SHORT STAFF SO THAT PUTS US INMATES ON LOCKDOWN SO THERE'S NO DAYROOM'S OR SHOWERS, OR PHONES, YARDS OR GYMS. WE SHOULDN'T GET PUNISHED FOR THE C.O'S NOT SHOWING UP FOR WORK.

- Individual in Custody at Pinckneyville

Sometimes movement is restricted due to a formal facility lockdown. Incarcerated individuals' daily routines, access to areas, programs, and visitation are limited during these periods.

According to IDOC [reporting](#), there have been 409 lockdowns across all IDOC facilities between the months of April through June, though this figure may not take into account partial facility lockdowns that also occur. One individual reported, *"Dixon C.C. is locking us incarcerated individuals down everyday, all day every Thursday at 3pm until Monday mornings."* IDOC data reflects 15 lockdown days at Dixon that month. This chart represents lockdowns reported to JHA this quarter, which is a subcategory of movement above.



We go on lockdowns almost every day that we cannot take showers, use the phone, or go to the yard.

- Individual in Custody at Robinson

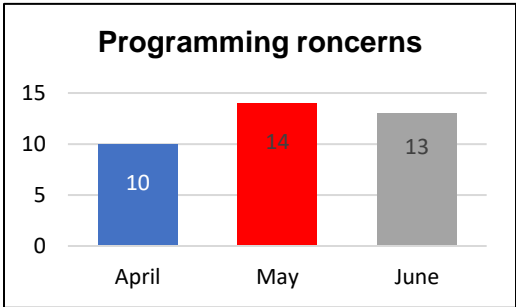
I have been at Shawnee for almost 10 months now and since getting here they refuse to Run Yard. They are only providing one hour of yard per month! This violates both state and federal Laws. Now because so many inmates are filing Grievance relating to the Total Lockdown of Shawnee by the Warden of Operations. The Warden ordered that All Grievance Forms must be approved by the Counselor before they are handed out. This violates the 6th amendment because they are pre-screening and Pre-approving who can and cant file a Written Grievance. Under PLRA you are required to

- Individual in Custody at Shawnee

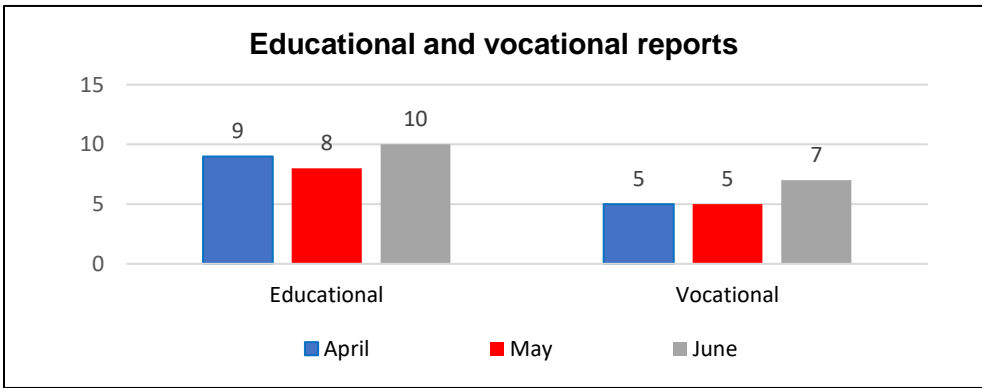
# Programming

Programming includes educational courses, self-betterment workshops, vocational, and other skill building classes. Many programs are currently unavailable or occur on a sporadic basis at prisons based on staffing and other issues. This quarter JHA received 37 communications from people about issues with programming. One individual in Centralia shared

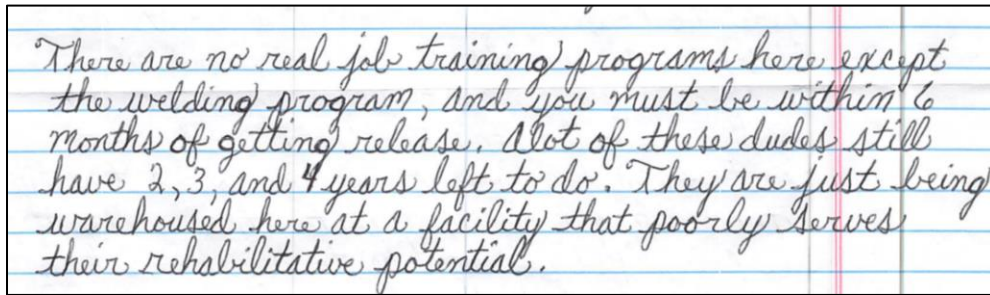
a very commonly reported concern: *“for inmates who have a lot of time still to serve, we get no chance to take any college or vocational classes as they give the short-term inmates priority.”*



This chart that represents two types of programming concerns reported this quarter; these are a subcategory of programming above.



Many people writing to JHA report they would like more job skill training.



There are no real job training programs here except the welding program, and you must be within 6 months of getting release. A lot of these dudes still have 2, 3, and 4 years left to do. They are just being warehoused here at a facility that poorly serves their rehabilitative potential.

- Individual in Custody at Pinckneyville

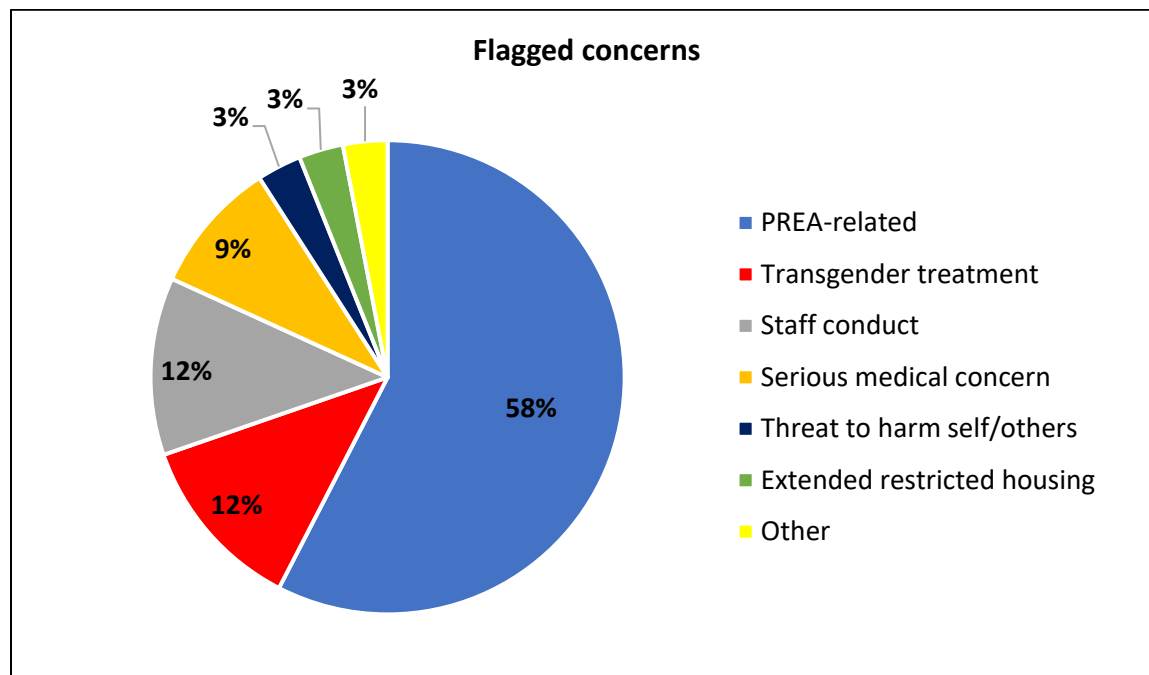
## Flagged Concerns

Every person who contacts JHA receives a response letter, but we are not able to provide individualized follow up to all of the letters we receive or issues raised to us. However, some letters which report situations or issues that are of an urgent nature are flagged for staff response. JHA flags issues which report an imminent threat to the health and safety of any person who lives or works in prison and which we believe may not otherwise be known to people inside or outside the prison system. This quarter, JHA flagged and followed up on 29 such letters.

We do not include ongoing conditions issues; general lack of staff responsiveness; general issues around programming, medical, and mental healthcare; and other things that certainly pose hardship, difficulty, and risk to people who are incarcerated but are articulated to us as chronic issues rather than emergent. This is a subjective determination based on the information available to JHA, which is admittedly limited and often unconfirmed.

As an independent oversight organization without the ability to investigate issues, the mechanisms available to JHA when serious, nascent concerns are brought to our attention include raising these issues with IDOC staff, administrators, prison wardens, and other governmental authorities; contacting family members or loved ones as makes sense or is possible; reaching out to other stakeholders for their involvement and to exert pressure on the Agency; and making the concern/information publicly available if appropriate in order to mobilize decision makers to act. JHA also believes that sharing information about the urgent issues

raised with us is an important way to increase transparency and expand public awareness of what happens inside prisons.



Letters are most often flagged for involving PREA-related issues. 19 of the 33 flagged concerns this quarter related to the sexual abuse or harassment of a person in custody (note that one letter could contain more than one concern). For example, we received a letter from someone at Shawnee stating that a C/O had assaulted him and made sexual comments toward him, and he was *“on hunger strike because the C/O’s here will not let me call PREA or report the assault.”*

PREA was implemented in order to reduce sexual abuse and harassment inside prisons. JHA is an independent outside entity through which people can make reports about sexual abuse or harassment to IDOC PREA officials, remaining anonymous on request. Our organization will receive “Attn: PREA” letters and forward them on to the IDOC PREA Coordinator in Springfield if it is clear that the person intended to make a PREA report. In cases where someone is not clearly trying to make a PREA report or is reporting an issue with a prior PREA report, JHA staff will also attempt to follow up as appropriate.

Harassment, the sexual misconduct by staff. I'm not doing well mentally after going through the sexual

—Individual in Custody at Pinckneyville

Letters may also be flagged and outreach conducted when there is sufficient specific information reported to be investigable by an entity with authority such as an assault by a staff member, issues related to transgender people, deaths in custody, or urgent medical concerns.

## Your Words Continue to Direct our Work

- **JHA survey update:** For the past 7 years, JHA has conducted surveys inside Illinois prisons to gather more input, perspectives, and experiences than possible during regular monitoring visits. Surveys provide crucial information to raise issues, flag concerns, and advocate for changes. An example of a significant reform that was supported by survey data was abolishing the \$5 medical co-pay. Legislators questioned how we knew the co-pay hurt incarcerated individuals and deterred preventative care. We relied on survey responses from people in IDOC to provide answers. Having concrete numbers and responses demonstrated the negative, harmful impact of the copay on prisoners. In 2022-23 JHA fielded a *Measuring the Quality of Prison Life* (MQPL) survey; we have published [preliminary results](#) on JHA's website. JHA is collaborating with criminal justice data experts to analyze MQPL data and looks forward to the publication of this work in the coming months.
- **Expanding juvenile justice oversight.** JHA is thrilled to announce that SB 2197, which expands the jurisdiction of the Illinois Office of the Independent Juvenile Ombudsman (OIJO) to cover county juvenile detention

### JHA's Q2 2023 monitoring visits included:

- Danville CC
- Lincoln CC
- Pinckneyville CC
- Taylorville CC
- Western CC
- Hill CC

centers, has been signed into law by Governor Pritzker. The OIJO already advocates for the rights of youth in IDJJ custody, and in the future will take on the same role for young people detained in county facilities.

- **CGL report and relevant links:** This is the CGL [report](#) on IDOC prison infrastructure. JHA's statement on the CGL report can be found [here](#). WBEZ has also published [news](#) coverage on the CGL report.
- **Pushing the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice.** JHA published a 2022 [evaluation of IDJJ](#), pushing for transformation away from large, adult-style youth prisons and toward smaller, localized, child-centered facilities.
- **Sharing Knowledge with Oversight Practitioners.** JHA contributed an [article](#) about Illinois juvenile justice oversight to the June issue of the newsletter published by the International Corrections & Prisons Association's Expert Network on External Prison Oversight and Human Rights.

## Thank You

JHA thanks everyone who has reached out to us with information and shared their experiences, insights, and perceptions of what is happening inside Illinois prisons. What you share with us allows us to ask questions, seek more information, and better monitor the implementation of policies and adherence to fair practices by IDOC. As an independent watchdog group, JHA's impact comes from acting as the eyes and ears of the public inside Illinois prisons. Sharing with us what you experience strengthens our monitoring work and empowers our advocacy efforts.

We also thank everyone who has read this update and listened to others' voices; we hope you will join us in working towards a safer and more humane system.



*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).*