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## **Update on Commissary Situation and Launch of JHA Online Survey**

### **February 23, 2022**

As of February 2022, IDOC is many months into a commissary disruption that has impacted the supply of items that incarcerated people rely on being able to purchase through commissary. Approximately 25% of the reports coming into JHA in early 2022 reported ongoing issues related to the commissary shortage. Despite IDOC's efforts to mitigate the issue, people have reported inability to buy food staples such as ramen and canned meat; basic hygiene items such as toothpaste, soap, and deodorant; and clothing items including cold weather clothing that is necessary both in IDOC's old, poorly insulated prisons and to go to yard or walk between buildings. Prison staff have also expressed safety concerns on behalf of themselves and the population over the rising tension in prisons that the commissary disruption has created. The causes and effects of the commissary disruption are detailed more fully in JHA's [December 2021 Update on Commissary Issues](#).

JHA has been meeting regularly with IDOC administrators to seek updates on the situation. IDOC administrators have communicated to JHA that detergent and personal hygiene items are distributed to the population, but JHA has heard from several incarcerated individuals that they are provided with only one bar of hotel-sized soap per person for both handwashing and showering, that they have little if any access to laundry detergent, and this problem is exacerbated by their reported inability to purchase additional clothing. JHA has repeatedly requested information about what items should be issued, to whom, and at what frequency, and has not received clear or consistent responses. It is unclear what items remain unavailable. While IDOC administrators have communicated that state meals adhere to nutritional guidelines, JHA also continues to hear from incarcerated people that they are not getting enough to eat, that the food is poor in quality, and that they lack varied, nutritionally balanced meals without the ability to supplement state meals with food purchased through commissary.

In November 2021, IDOC entered into emergency contracts to stock commissary. Administrators told JHA that emergency contracts were for items the vendors represented they

had in stock, which could be delivered within the standard delivery window of 10 to 14 days. JHA has heard some reports from incarcerated people suggesting that the commissary issue may have started to improve in some prisons under the emergency contracts.

JHA received a master list of items available through the emergency contracts as of January 1, 2022, as well as order forms or receipts from several of the emergency vendors showing which items that prisons had ordered were unavailable. While these documents show that some items have been shipped to prisons since the emergency contracts went into effect, it appears that significant portions of many orders from that time period were not filled due to supply issues on the vendor side. The items that were not in stock consisted largely of food items and clothing, which is consistent with the issues that JHA continues to hear about. JHA also continues to hear about lack of available feminine hygiene products in the women's prisons, despite reports from IDOC about orders placed for both sanitary napkins and tampons. JHA has not yet received a response to our recent inquiries about whether these items have been received.

JHA has also heard from organizations in the community that have products they would like to donate to incarcerated people but that found IDOC's [posted](#) donation policy prohibitively confusing. These donations are needed, and lack of a clear and implementable policy that enables community generosity to benefit people in prisons further exacerbates their lack of access to essential items. JHA has raised this issue to IDOC administrators several times.

While JHA continues to hear from incarcerated people, our new [online survey](#) serves as an additional way to collect information from those in the community who may have knowledge about the commissary disruption that they would like to share. If you are working in or are in contact with an individual incarcerated in an Illinois state prison, please consider helping us learn more about the commissary disruption by taking our survey. It will be open through March 31, 2022.