
Survey Report



Analysis of 2023 MQPL Survey Comments

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

Lawrence Correctional Center

Lawrence is a maximum-security male prison within the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) that housed 617 people on March 27, 2023. Lawrence has been undergoing a transition from being a medium-security prison to a maximum over the past few years, during which time some medium-security people remained at the prison. In addition to housing general population maximum and medium-security at the time of the survey, Lawrence also housed almost all individuals in IDOC who are in [Administrative Detention](#) status (approximately 75), individuals in [Protective Custody](#), and had a particular housing unit (R7) where people were typically housed when they were new to the prison that had greater restrictions.

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 Lawrence had an opportunity to participate in the voluntary and anonymous survey if they chose to do so. JHA received 143 responses to the MQPL survey from people at Lawrence through July 26, representing approximately 23% of the static population. JHA visited Lawrence in October 2023, at which time population had increased to about 750 people, with about 100 people remaining who were classified as medium-security.

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 Lawrence can be found in our [2023 MQPL Survey Comments](#) report. Quantitative survey results for Lawrence can be found in our [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.

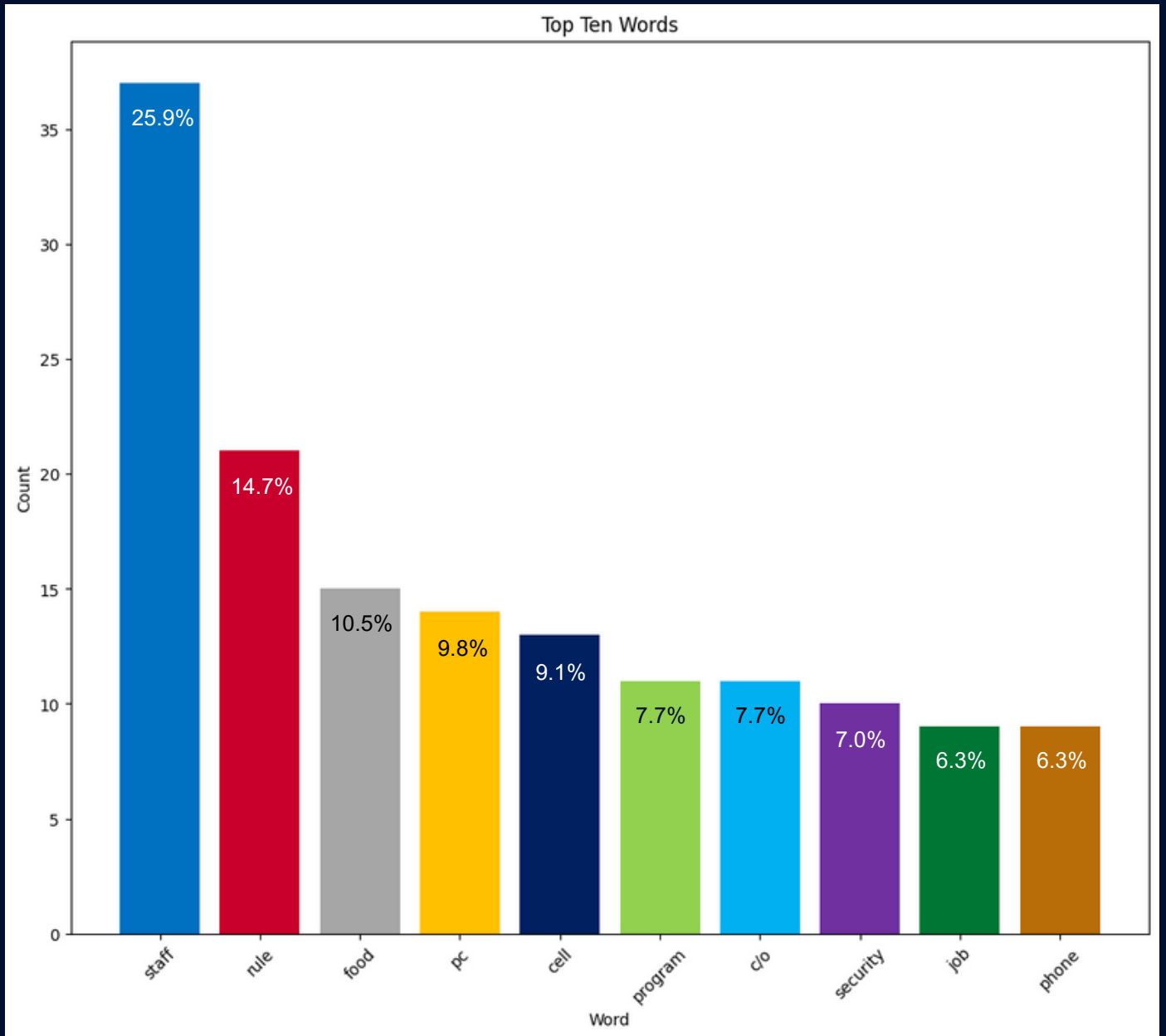
There are limitations with this method, such as sentiment analysis. For example we are unable to distinguish statements such as "The doctor is good" and "I haven't seen a doctor." However, it is reasonable to conclude that instances of "doctor" are in a negative context in response to the question. Additionally, 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

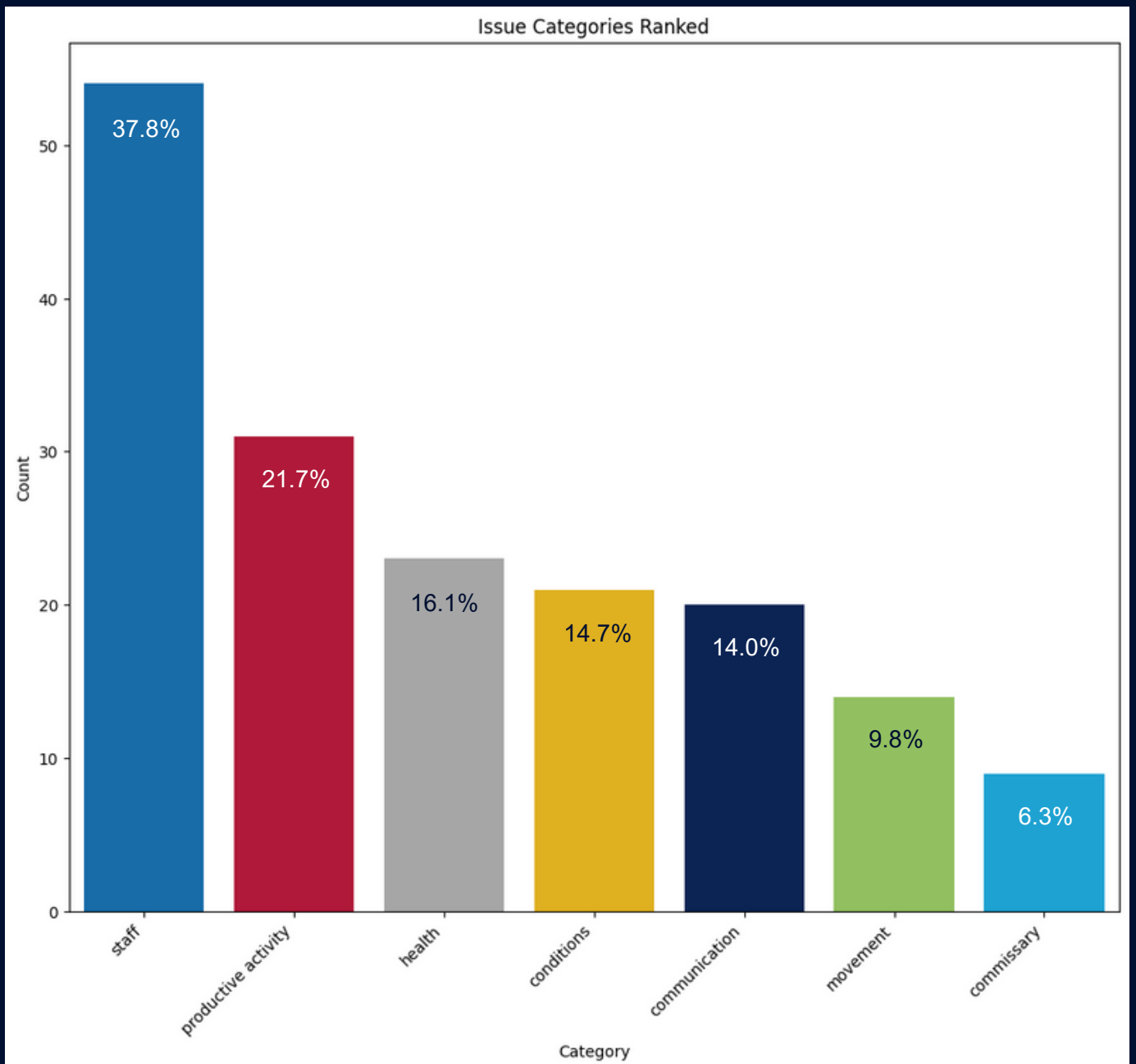
Used in responses to "What are the most negative things about life in this prison?"

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 Lawrence survey responses

1

STAFF

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

staff never wanna Follow the rules or give us what we have coming according to the rules, but are quick to penalize us the moment we break a rule with the maximum penalty.

unprofessional over aggressive staff and inconsistent administration

They are so short staffed they lock us down alot, they dont have officers for property or other places because they must pull them to work units or walks,

The way staff treat & look down on incarcerated individuals

Dealing with staff who can care less about your well-being or issues. Dealing with racism. Being punished for protecting yourself.

2

PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITY

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

lack of job opportunities, lack of ability to earn money for release, lack of ability to earn money for wife & daughter

Being warehoused w/ no real opportunity to get out of AD; no school, only 4-hour of yard, Nothing to stimulate our mind. AD basically being Disciplinary, contrary to IDOC's argument that it's not.

The risk assessment tool works against guys like me. I've been rated Low. This Low level means I am rehabilitated and my chances of reoffending are low. I've been locked up 33yrs and have 12 left but my chances of getting into programming is NONE. so almost no good time for me.

In order to get in classes you have to intentionally fail the risk assessments that show you are less likely to reoffend.

1. No programs for P.C. 2. No jobs for P.C.

3

HEALTH

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

Healthcare is Horrible, and "Medical Holds" are being used to Hold "Medium" Security guys Hostage, and not allowing them to transfer somewhere they can continue moving Forward.

No Doctor since May of 2021!

Health care is not taken serious enough!

mental health services are not available immeditly, especially when Requesting a I on I. They keep saying not enough counselors, yet they sit in their office doing nothing

Medical treatment takes too long (1 month to finish proper channels to see a doctor).

4

CONDITIONS

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

we had no hot water or heat for a month.

too much isolation in cells—windows covered

Everythings Falling Apart heat, water stuff alway not working

Very weak wifi. most people with tablets can't even use them while in the cell.

Over crowded 2 people in cell built for one.

5

COMMUNICATION

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

People on A grade are not getting their proper phone call in RH

Not enough phones in the dayroom to use the phones

Not being able to hug your family on v.sits

Not Enough communication with my family.

They need to... expand The Hours of visiting For people that wants to Ride 5 Hour's to see There loved ones

6

MOVEMENT

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

P.C. yard is just a concrete slab nothing else

Only 4 hour of yard

STAFFING ISSUES THAT CAUSE CANCELATIONS OF YARD, GYM, DAYROOM, SCHOOL, PROGRAMS ETC...

ONLY approved PC is allowed yard or dayroom. If you are approved PC in another prison and get transferred to Lawrence, they make you sign in to PC again... Even though you are supposed to be already approved PC upon arrival, this place won't let you have any yard or dayroom.

No dayroom time/yard time for "unapproved" or "kickout" PC individuals.

**Commissary whenever they want, once a month
Sometimes twice**

the over priced items on Commissary.

**never enough staff on commissary always out of
stuff.**

Commissary and dietary food suck!



This report was compiled by JHA staff. Media inquiries should be directed to JHA's Executive Director Jennifer Vollen-Katz at 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 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.