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**Survey Report**



# **Analysis of 2023 MQPL Survey Comments**

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

# Taylorville Correctional Center

Taylorville is a minimum-security male prison within the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) that housed 1,067 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 Taylorville had an opportunity to participate in the voluntary and anonymous survey if they chose to do so. JHA received 250 responses to the MQPL survey from people at Taylorville through June 15, 2023, representing approximately 23% of the static population. JHA visited Taylorville in May 2023. Taylorville had about 100 spaces in a “Voluntary Sex Offender Treatment Program” (VSOTP) and had transitioned to having more than 90% of the population who were registrants, which was an increase from about 50% in 2021.

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

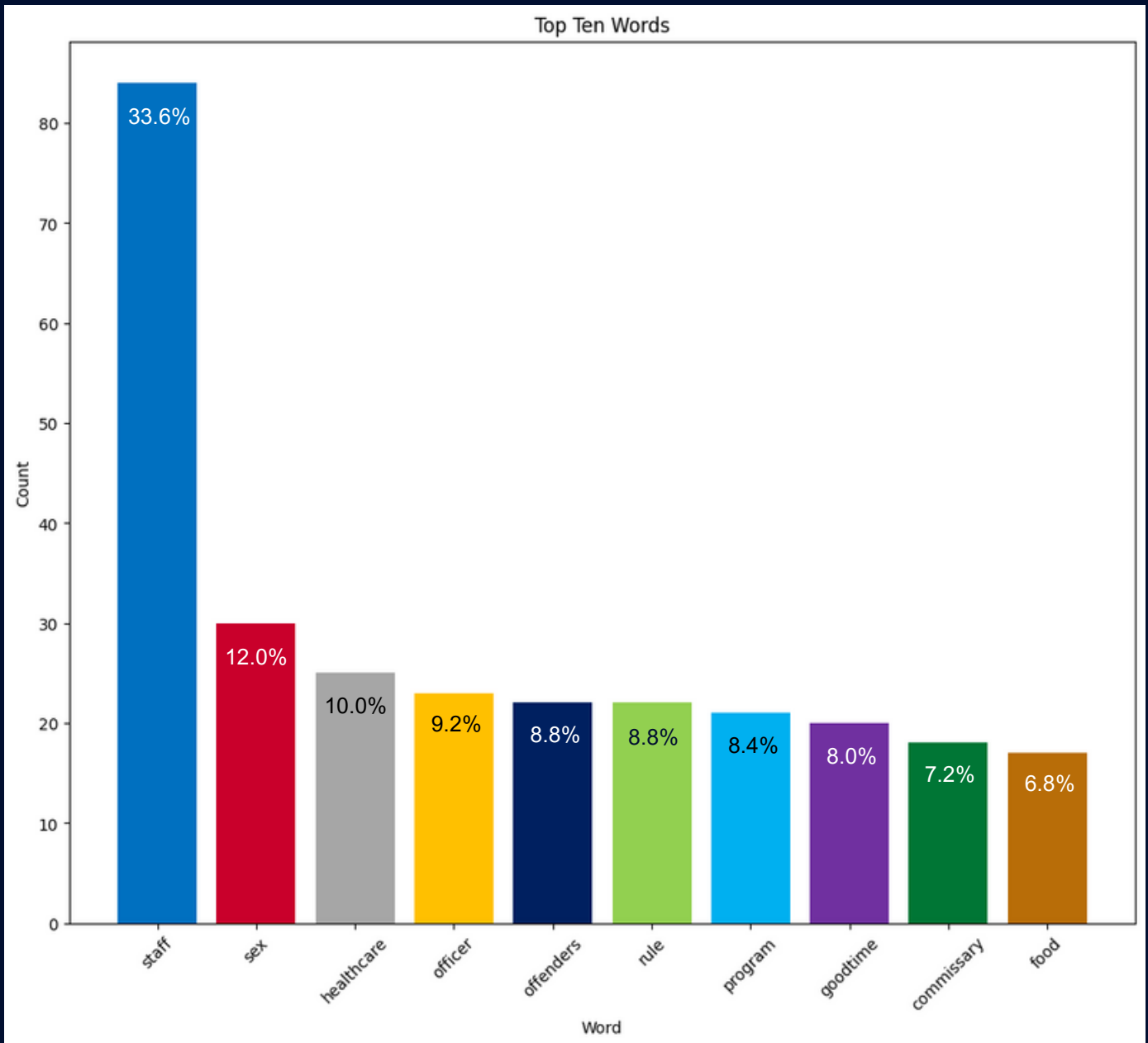
This report includes quotes from survey responses that we found to be either representative of the diversity of issues raised for each category or particularly insightful. Some quotes have been abbreviated to highlight the relevant issue.



## Top 10 Indicator Words

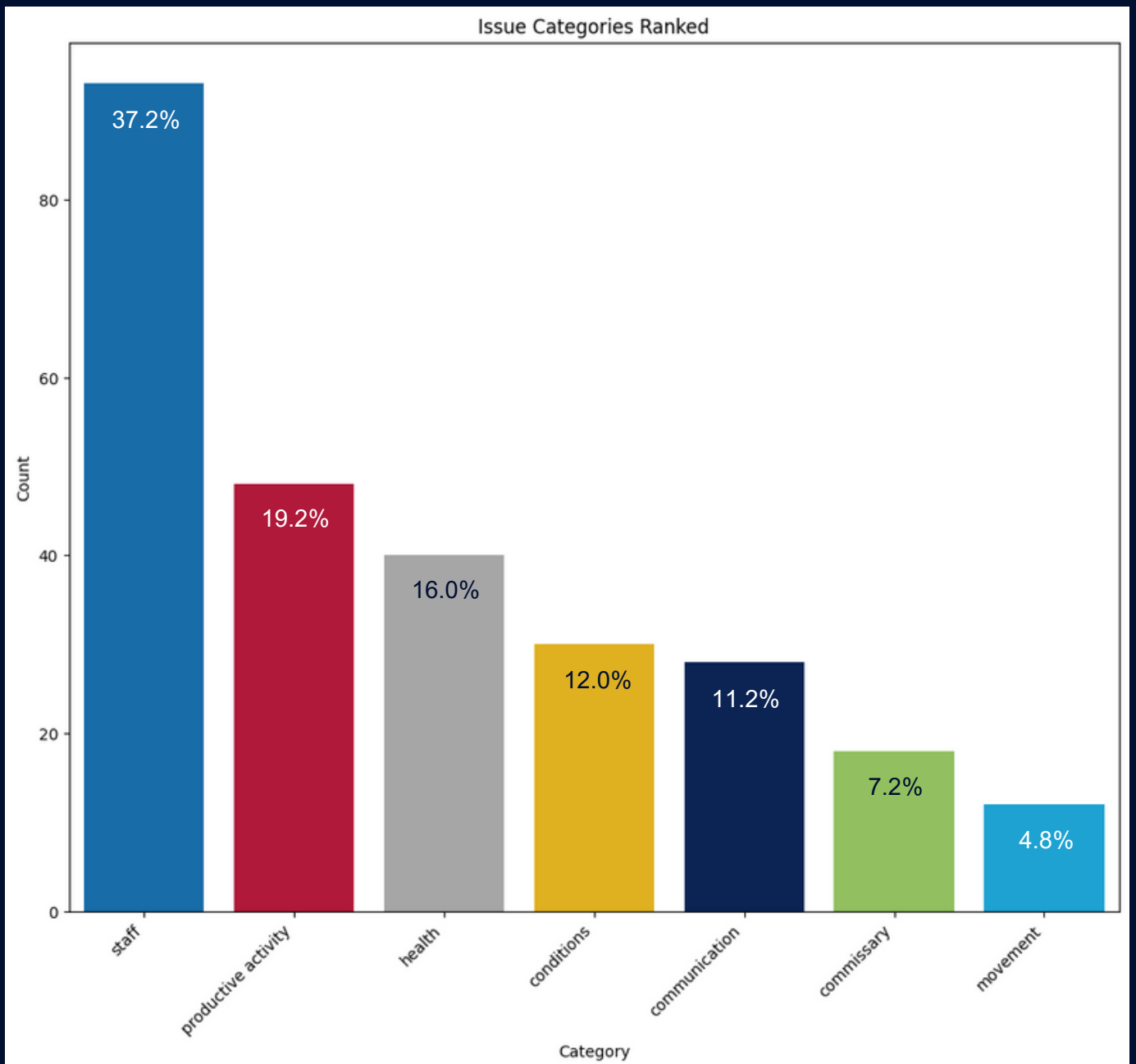
Used in responses to "What are the most negative things about life in this prison?"

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 Taylorville survey responses

1

## STAFF

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

Certain staff will look up the offenses of certain individuals in custody then target those individuals based on their convictions (shakedowns, harassment).

Inconsistency on part of C/O's to interpret the rules.

The derogatory manner and ways staff treats us, just because this person is 90% sex offenders that's just cause for them to treat and talk down to us. One individual who commits a senseless murder is treated better

There is no accountability among staff when they harm us. The discriminatory treatment of the sex offender population.

The rude comments made by officers. They conduct compliance checks to dispose of nuisance trash, But when they do conduct there compliance checks they tear Everything up!

2

## PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITY

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

Can not get good time of any sort at all if you don't sign up for the S.O. program. Not all are treated the same when it comes to receiving good time.

The S.O. program is so backed up its basically non-existent and too little too late. You can't do both drug/alcohol and S.O. treatment.

Not enough opportunities to advance my education or prepare for society.

Only non-sex offenders get the best jobs; we are treated like 4th class inmates

In order to receive "good time" you have to complete the sex offender program. They won't let you take the class until you have 18-12 months left.

3

HEALTH

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

Healthcare is very difficult to get and usually not effective.

The staff have no regard to anyone mental/ physical health. When A fight/health code gets called the Staff are very slow to respond on unit Resulting In many Individuals harm/death (on a certain occassion)

The nurses don't really try to understand and help you when it comes to try and say want's hurting you. Only the doctor try.

Making us stand outside in all type of weather to receive our meds.

The healthcare professionals are not very professional. Apparently Ibuprofen is the cure all for everything and they don't tell you what is wrong with you.

4

CONDITIONS

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

Our AC & ice machine are broke. There is mold everywhere. In the showers, the kitchen, the ceiling tile etc, etc. Also phone is Broken

Small portions of food in dietary. You only get half the amount of most food per menu.

~~the~~ the VentALATION is poor in the Doams Bathroom

Cable has been downgraded and channels lost.

The food they serve us is small portions.



5

## COMMUNICATION

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

You are lucky to get a phone call a day, two at most.

Visiting is too short for being a minimum prison

there are only 4 phones per wing, there are 100 people per wing there are 20 people cramed in a small room. Commissary is horrible staff treats you a certian way because of your offense.

Mail Handling (six weeks behind at the moment, with little sorted each day)

Mail is very very very slow.

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## COMMISSARY

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

Commissary item is limited

Commissary is always messed up. Half the time they don't have what your wanting.

The fact that they sell things on commissary then tell you, you CANT have it anymore

The cost of food in commissary.  
Not enough Food in commissary.

Food and commissary has plummeted in quality in the last 2 years.

No phone access on yard.

Staffing shortages (post covid mostly) that cause yard/programs to not be offered.

~~When~~ Short-staffing happened too often!  
When shorted staff - we lost chapel services, LTS: Yard  
line and or Gyms' (Leisure Times Services)

Lack of staff causes difficulties i.e. no construction teacher, no officer for yard, etc.



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.