

Lockdowns harm people in IDOC

Lack of out-of-cell time is detrimental to health and safety

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Throughout 2023 JHA received reports from people incarcerated in IDOC about **lack of out-of-cell time and excessive lockdowns**, which they in part attribute to low staffing levels. The Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) reports they continue to struggle with high levels of staff vacancies; in July, they reported nearly a third of correctional officer positions were vacant. These numbers have real consequences that make living and working inside of prisons more difficult and less safe for everyone.

Just two examples of recent reports we've received:

- In November, JHA heard from someone at Graham (see box) reporting increased use of lockdowns and providing **careful documentation of half of the month without movement in October**.
- In December, an outside supporter shared with JHA a report from someone in Lawrence stating they had been on lockdown for 10-15 days of the last 30, and were denied showers, law library, phones, visits, medical sick call, and were served cold trays.

This level of restriction is also reflected publicly in [IDOC Operations and Management Reports](#), which show 747 days of Administrative Lockdowns across IDOC in the first six months of Fiscal Year 2024.

Generally, the reported lockdowns mean that all non-essential movement is restricted, including minimal opportunities for out-of-cell, prosocial / communal, or outdoor activities, resulting in solitary confinement / restrictive housing type restrictions for those housed in cells and lack of opportunity to engage in most productive activities for all. Many people responding to JHA's [Measuring the Quality of Prison Life surveys](#) in 2023 also reported getting less than two hours out of their cells and sleeping areas. Lockdowns also restrict visits from outside supports and have myriad other negative consequences such as potential increases in stress and mental health deterioration.

"There is a lot of growing frustrations among the [Individuals in Custody] here, as well as feelings of hopelessness and helplessness."

— from an individual incarcerated in Graham

This individual went on to detail the following commonly reported negative consequences of the October lockdowns at Graham:

- Inability to attend medication lines to obtain timely refills
- Law library passes cancelled, potentially resulting in missed court deadlines
- No movement for work or school
- Missed productive activity opportunities, also resulting in inability to earn sentence credits
- Inadequate access to exercise with yard and gym times canceled
- Not being able to make phone calls
- Limited shower access
- Even greater restrictions on commissary access (which continues to have supply problems)
- Missing religious services

There is no quick fix to the address the high number of staff vacancies; however, **excessive time in cells and living in lockdown conditions must end.**

To address this, IDOC must:

1. Utilize available mechanisms to further reduce the IDOC population, such as applying all available sentencing credits (including those that are now retroactively available) and expediting medical clemency releases
2. Reduce staffing deficits by closing unnecessary, decrepit, and expensive prisons, wherein [IDOC has \\$2.5 billion in deferred maintenance](#)
3. Redeploy staff from closed prisons to other facilities to make better use of limited resources and improve living and working conditions for everyone
4. Address staff recruitment and retention factors such as lack of scheduling control, use of overtime, and inability to communicate outside of facility during one's shift
5. Ensure staff are deployed efficiently throughout facilities in order to promote productive activity, including prioritizing day shifts

JHA continues to advocate for sensible solutions to improve well-being and humane treatment in IDOC, and appreciates the shared and vital insights of those inside. **Your words matter.**



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