



## John Howard Association of Illinois

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### Monitoring Visit to Menard Correctional Center 6/21/2011

On June 21, 2011, the John Howard Association (JHA) visited Menard Correctional Center (Menard), a Level One maximum-security adult male facility located in Chester, Illinois. Menard is the largest maximum-security facility in the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC).



#### Vital Statistics:

Population: 3744  
Rated Capacity: 3640  
Average Annual  
Cost Per Inmate: \$20,736.00  
Average Age: 34

*(Source: IDOC)*

#### Key Observations:

- In the past year, Menard has had an alarming number of reported staff and inmate assaults.
- Menard has the worst inmate-to-staff ratio of all Illinois' maximum-security facilities, as well as that of several medium and high-minimum security facilities.
- Over the last year and a half, Menard was on full or partial lockdown roughly half of the time.
- The average inmate at Menard spend roughly 21 to 22 hours a day locked in cells idle, with little or no activity or opportunity for normal social and human interaction.
- The racial makeup of Menard's population is roughly 63 percent African American, 25 percent White, 12 percent Hispanic, .02 percent Asian, and .01 percent other.

## **Monitoring Visit to Menard Correctional Center 6/21/2011**

### **Executive Summary**

On June 21, 2011, the John Howard Association (JHA) visited Menard Correctional Center (Menard), a Level One maximum-security adult male facility located in Chester, Illinois. Menard is the largest maximum-security facility in the Illinois Department of Corrections (DOC). Opened in 1878, Menard is the second oldest prison in the state. On the date of JHA's visit, Menard housed 3,618 inmates, a population roughly 117 percent over the facility's rated-design capacity of 3,098 inmates.

Like other Illinois facilities, Menard suffers from systemic overcrowding, understaffing, and limited access to medical and psychiatric treatment, rehabilitative services, education, and jobs for inmates. Indeed, Menard has the worst inmate to staff ratio of all Illinois' maximum-security facilities, as well as that of several medium and high-minimum security facilities. Despite efforts by Menard's administration to fill staff vacancies, lack of funding and gross delays inherent to the state's slow and convoluted hiring processes routinely frustrate these efforts.

In the absence of sufficient space, staffing and resources, the vast majority of Menard's inmates do not have educational, vocational or job assignments. Consequently, the average inmate at Menard spend roughly 21 to 22 hours a day locked in cells idle, with little or no activity or opportunity for normal social and human interaction. Apart from this, a large portion of Menard's inmates (415 at the time of JHA's visit) were housed in segregation. These inmates are even more isolated than the general population and have even less opportunity for activity or interaction, as they are afforded only five to seven hours of out-of-cell time total per week.

This kind of prolonged isolation, environmental deprivation, and inactivity can have a profoundly destructive effect on inmates' physical and mental health, further taxing the facility's already overextended staff and resources.<sup>1</sup> A large body of literature establishes that segregation conditions can induce severe psychiatric illnesses and mental disorders even in otherwise healthy persons. The likelihood of this occurring is greatly increased by virtue that a large portion of inmates have been subjected to repeated and prolonged

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<sup>1</sup> See J. Metzner and J. Fellner, *Solitary Confinement and Mental Illness in U.S. Prisons: A Challenge for Medical Ethics*, The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, Volume 38, Number 1, (March 2010). See also *ACLU: Stop Solitary - The Dangerous Overuse of Solitary Confinement in the United State, Articles and Resources* available at <http://www.aclu.org/stop-solitary-dangerous-overuse-solitary-confinement-united-states>.

trauma since childhood.<sup>2</sup> Unsurprisingly, serious psychiatric disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders, and mental illness are endemic in the prison population.<sup>3</sup> Menard's population is no exception. In Menard's segregation unit alone, more than half of the inmates were taking psychotropic medications and/or being treated for mental illness.

Despite its significantly large number of mentally ill inmates, Menard, at the time of JHA's visit, staffed only four part-time psychiatrists (for a total of 64 hours per week, 15 hours provided remotely through telepsychiatry rather than in person), two full-time psychologists (for a total of 80 hours per week), and two full-time social workers (for a total of 80 hours per week). From sheer numbers alone, it is clear that the mental health needs of a population of 3,618 persons at high risk for mental illness and traumatic disorders cannot begin to be met at a staffing level equivalent to less than six full-time mental health professionals facility-wide.<sup>4</sup>

A correctional officer that JHA interviewed confirmed that overcrowding and lack of programming and assignments, coupled with insufficient security and professional staff, have increased pressure, stress and opportunities for violence at Menard. The officer's observation was consistent with studies showing that overcrowding, inactivity and isolation tend to increase inmates' levels of frustration and stress, which, in turn, increases tension and stress for staff.<sup>5</sup> These institutional stressors can thus have a destructive and demoralizing impact on correctional staff as well, whose jobs, even under the best of conditions, are extraordinarily demanding.

Given these conditions, it is perhaps not surprising that JHA has received an exceedingly high number of reports from inmates and inmates' family members regarding correctional staff physically assaulting, and verbally abusing inmates. To its credit, Menard's administration was responsive to these reports and insistent that staff is held accountable and that abuse of inmates is not passively tolerated. This stance is critical because abuse of inmates and use of excessive force cannot be controlled absent strong oversight and leadership by administrators and supervisory staff.

Overall, JHA was impressed by Menard's administrators, who seem genuinely proactive, creative, and engaged in identifying, documenting and rectifying problems in the facility.

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<sup>2</sup> See *The Implications of Trauma and Abuse*, International Justice Project, available at <http://www.internationaljusticeproject.org/pdfs/trauma.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The Bureau of Justice Statistics Report of Fall, 2006 reflected that more than half of all state prison and jail inmates in the United States have mental health problems.

<sup>4</sup> This is an emergent issue, particularly given the evidence that idleness, lack of programming, lack of physical and social activity, and long-term isolation all tend to acutely exacerbate preexisting mental illness. See M. Schlanger, *Regulating Segregation The Contribution of the ABA Criminal Justice Standards On the Treatment of Prisoners*, 47 Am. Criminal Law Review 1421 (Fall 2010).

<sup>5</sup> See *Confronting Confinement: A Report of the Commission of Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons* available at [www.VERADC.org/pdfs/Confronting\\_Confinement.pdf](http://www.VERADC.org/pdfs/Confronting_Confinement.pdf).

For example, despite extremely limited resources, the administration has worked to reduce the use of segregation, increase the amount of showers for segregation inmates, and increase recreation time for inmates as a reward for good behavior. The administration has also worked to increase inmates' jobs, including employing inmates in a gardening project and in a mural project to commemorate Menard's veterans. On first arriving at Menard, the Warden and his staff also took a complete photographic inventory of physical plant problems in the century-old facility and are systematically working to address these physical plant issues.

The practical reality remains, however, that the ability of Menard's administration to address systemic issues is seriously curtailed by overcrowding, understaffing, and lack of resources. Yet, the response of Illinois elected officials to the crisis in prison overcrowding has been to strain correctional facilities further – by slashing DOC's budget, eliminating education, treatment and rehabilitative services for inmates, suspending meritorious good time credit, and reducing prison staffing levels – all the while doing nothing to reduce the population. Time will tell that these actions served only to compromise the safety and stability of Illinois prisons, and the safety and welfare of the public, by releasing inmates back into the community with serious untreated physical and mental illnesses, and without job skills, education or rehabilitation.

### ***Recommendations:***

- (1) The Illinois Governor and General Assembly must reduce the prison population through sentencing reform, enacting a safe replacement for Meritorious Good Time, and providing Menard and other DOC facilities with the funding and staffing needed to meet the population's basic physical and mental health needs. If such actions are not taken, it is all but inevitable that this issue will end up being litigated in the courts.
  
- (2) The practice of using prolonged segregation to discipline mentally ill inmates should be abandoned at Menard and all DOC facilities. Compelling evidence establishes that the environmental deprivation, social isolation and inactivity in segregation exacerbates existing mental illness and can independently induce mental illness and traumatic disorders in otherwise healthy persons. However, Menard's administration is to be greatly commended for independently undertaking initiatives to categorically reduce the use of segregation at Menard, and instituting small measures to increase the quality of life for segregation inmates, such as doubling permitted showers from once a week to twice weekly. JHA encourages the administration to continue these efforts.

- (3) Further inquiry should be undertaken by Menard's administration and the DOC to determine whether excessive use of force and abuse of inmates may be a systemic problem at Menard, given the unusually high number of reports JHA received from inmates of abuse by correctional staff. JHA was encouraged that Menard's administration was responsive regarding these reports and indicated its intent to make an appropriate inquiry. To prevent abuse, it is critical that administrators and supervisory staff make a demonstrated, visible commitment that abuse and misuse of force will not be tolerated.
- (4) Contingent upon funding, the DOC should install video monitoring and recording equipment in all of Menard's housing units and generally increase the use of video monitoring and recording in DOC facilities across the board.
- (5) Menard's administration should expand its existing regimen of monitoring heat in the housing units. Specifically, the administration should monitor temperatures inside the cells themselves – particularly the segregation cells – given that temperatures in cells could be appreciably greater than the unit's common areas due to lack of ventilation and body heat generated by persons being held in close proximity.

In addition, inmates who suffer from high blood pressure or heart disease, or who take certain medications for depression, insomnia or poor circulation should be identified, and individually monitored and attended since they are at greater risk for heat-related illness. If a formalized protocol to this effect has not already been instituted, the DOC should implement one immediately at Menard and all other DOC facilities without air-conditioned housing.

- (6) JHA fully supports and encourages the administration's ongoing efforts to increase educational programming and jobs for Menard's inmates and to fill staff vacancies to improve the facility's functioning and delivery of essential services. Overcrowding and warehousing inmates without jobs, rehabilitative programming or education and without adequate access to health care and basic services, causes immense human suffering and undermines a facility's security and stability. It also has a profoundly debilitating impact on the morale, health, safety and well-being of staff. Ultimately, releasing these inmates back into the community without treatment or rehabilitative services will dangerously compromise the public's welfare and safety.

## **Introduction**

This report examines the following issues: Lockdowns; Correctional Staff; Segregation; Living Conditions; Physical & Mental Health Services; Education, Vocational Programming & Industries; Library, Mailroom, Clerical, Security & Other Staffing Issue; and Population & Facility Demographics.

## **Security**

On first entering Menard's visitors' center, JHA was struck by the unusually strained and tense atmosphere of the facility, even compared to other maximum-security prisons on lockdown. The demeanor of the security staff was remarkably hostile and aggressive towards inmates' family members and to JHA's own monitoring group members. While JHA's prison tours usually take five to six hours, staff insisted that this visit would be limited to a 20 minute tour of the facility with no opportunity to speak with inmates or to visit the areas JHA requested to see. The misunderstanding ultimately was cleared up after a staff member, at JHA's insistence, called the Warden's office to request clarification. Menard's administration thereafter met with JHA, provided full access to the facility and inmates, and was totally accommodating and forthcoming in showing JHA all parts of the facility, providing information and answering questions.

This incident was perhaps not surprising given the number of violent assaults that have taken place at Menard. This calendar year, there have been 14 staff assaults. There is also evidence that some staff members are abusing inmates. During JHA's visit, an unusually large number of inmates in segregation, protective custody, and the general population reported instances of correctional staff using excessive force or physically abusing inmates.<sup>6</sup> Notably, apart from in-person reports during the visit, JHA has received a substantial number of letters and calls from inmates and their family members in the year preceding the visit regarding physical and verbal abuse by correctional staff at

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<sup>6</sup> Two inmates independently and separately reported to JHA witnessing a group of correctional officers take an inmate into the showers and beat him. One of these inmates also reported that an officer approached him after the fact and threatened to retaliate against him if he told anyone what he had seen. Another inmate recounted an incident where a correctional officer took him into a shower area and beat him because he had tapped on the officer's shoulder to get his attention. Another inmate reported to JHA that he witnessed a group of officers take an inmate from his cell to "stomp" him. Several inmates reported being punched by officers or witnessing officers strike inmates without provocation. Furthermore, several inmates reported instances of inmates being singled out for physical or verbal abuse by correctional staff, or being retaliated against for filing grievances or having committed past acts of misconduct against an officer. Two inmates separately reported witnessing one correctional officer rip up an inmate's grievance form. Several inmates reported instances where correctional staff arbitrarily issued baseless tickets to inmates they personally did not like. One of these inmates hypothesized that there was an incentive to arbitrarily issue tickets and impose disciplinary segregation to keep the segregation unit full, since there was not enough room in general population housing. A significant number of inmates whom JHA interviewed also reported being verbally abused, threatened, bullied, or referred to with profanity and slurs by Menard's correctional staff.

Menard. One inmate that JHA spoke with succinctly summed up Menard's tense atmosphere, stating they all felt they were "walking on egg shells."

These reports are troubling as they point to potential signs of a systemic breakdown in security. Security is the essential foundation of a functioning prison. Inadequate security not only jeopardizes the physical safety of inmates and staff, but it also undermines rehabilitation efforts and creates a psychologically damaging environment for everyone who lives and works behind the prison wall.

### **Lockdowns**

A point of great frustration for many of Menard's inmates and their family members is Menard's frequent use of lockdowns. A Menard correctional officer that JHA spoke with confirmed that, faced with overcrowding and understaffing, particularly security staff, Menard frequently must resort to using lockdowns to maintain safety, order, and institutional control. The DOC's own statistical reports confirm that lockdowns, both full and partial, are routine at Menard, and in combination occur with greater frequency at Menard than at Stateville Correctional Center, a comparable Level One maximum-security facility. Indeed, over the last year and a half, Menard was on full or partial lockdown roughly half of the time.

During lockdowns, inmates are subject to severely restrictive living conditions. Inmates are confined to their cells for 24 hours a day; visiting hours with family are suspended; showers, phone calls, yard and recreation time, commissary, and access to the library and legal services are restricted or suspended; participation in educational, vocational and rehabilitative programs is restricted or suspended entirely; and access to mental and physical health care services is greatly restricted. Inmates who depend on prison wages cannot work. Friends, family members and the children of inmates, who have often travelled long distances, expended significant funds, and taken time off from work or school to visit are simply turned away. As a practical matter, because of the frequency of lockdowns, Menard's inmates live in *de facto* disciplinary segregation much of the time, whether or not they are actually assigned to the segregation unit.

This is a troubling situation. While lockdowns are unquestionably a necessary, important security measure, they are also extremely disruptive to inmates, staff, and a facility's normal functioning. Ultimately, repeated use of lockdowns can undermine the stability and security of a facility by upsetting predictability and normal operations, and increasing inmates' stress and aggression through increased isolation, idleness and inactivity. This can generate greater incidents of aggression and violence, leading to greater lockdowns, creating a vicious circle.

The emotional and psychological toll on inmates, their children and families of being deprived a long-anticipated visit due to a lockdown also cannot be overstated. Visits between inmates and loved ones are not a luxury in prison, but are essential to

maintaining inmates' morale and mental well-being and thus instrumental to preserving the safety and stability of the facility.

Moreover, lockdowns tax a facility's already limited resources, as all meals and essential services must be provided to inmates in their cells – greatly increasing the burden on a facility's library, dietary, dental, medical, and mental health services.

In short, lockdowns are not a viable long-term means to deal with the effects of prison overcrowding and maintain institutional stability and safety at places like Menard. Absent responsible action by the Illinois governor and legislature to reduce the prison population and fund sufficient staffing levels to meet the needs of state prisoners, however, Menard's administration and the DOC have little at their disposal to deal with these problems apart from such expensive, disruptive and, ultimately, counterproductive measures.

### **Segregation**

At the time of JHA's visit, a large number of inmates were housed in segregation; in total, 414. According to the administration, Menard has the capacity to house 443 inmates in disciplinary segregation and 56 in administrative segregation.

Menard's segregation unit contains both single-bed and double-bed cells. The unit is monitored by video camera. The administration expressed that it strongly favors using video cameras as an effective tool for monitoring inmate and staff incidents as well as preventing and documenting any abuse or misconduct. Indeed, if funding and resources were available, Menard's administration would welcome having monitoring cameras installed throughout the facility, including the general population housing units.

JHA agrees with Menard's administration that the installation and use of recording video cameras can greatly reduce incidents of abuse and misconduct. If funding permits, JHA would strongly encourage widespread use of video monitoring and recording by the DOC in all of its facilities.

Menard's segregation inmates are allotted two showers per week. Originally, they were allotted only one weekly shower. However, Menard's administration worked to change this policy by creating an additional shower officer. The administration is to be greatly commended for instituting a small but substantial measure to improve the quality of life for segregation inmates. Notably, the process of taking segregation inmates to and from showers and the yard to their cells is labor intensive because each inmate must be individually, separately escorted by a correctional staff member, one-at-a-time.

Segregation inmates receive all meals in their cells and are given five hours of out-of-cell recreation/yard time per week. A maximum of 10 segregation inmates can go to the yard at once, at which time they are allowed to play basketball together. JHA noted signs posted on outside fenced-in areas instructing other inmates that talking to segregation

inmates would result in a ticket being issued. Segregation inmates are permitted two one-hour “no-contact” visits with friends and family per month.

At the time of JHA’s visit, approximately 250 segregation inmates (more than half of the segregation population), were taking psychotropic medications and/or being treated for mental illness. This number is extremely disturbing and, yet, wholly unsurprising, given the evidence that segregation greatly exacerbates existing mental illness and can independently induce acute mental illness and traumatic disorders in otherwise healthy persons.

JHA strongly disagrees with the practice of using segregation as a means of disciplining inmates suffering from mental illness for all the reasons previously stated, and urges the DOC to abandon this practice entirely.

Menard’s administration, however, is to be greatly commended for undertaking to reduce the use of segregation across the board by reinstating a “programs team” that has the power to issue “minor” tickets to punish small disciplinary infractions, rather than issuing major tickets and imposing segregation for every transgression.

### **Living Conditions**

Multiple inmates reported that cells sometimes lacked either hot or cold water. The administration acknowledged a prior incident where a computer problem temporarily interrupted the flow of hot water to parts of the facility, but the problem was fixed. The administration further indicated there sometimes were problems with the delivery of cold water. Plumbing parts had been ordered to fix this. At the time of JHA’s visit, Menard lacked an in-house plumber. Inmate plumbers were sometimes used to assist with certain repairs and, in the event of an emergency, the facility can temporarily obtain a plumber for a 60 day period.

Interruption of water services raises obvious health and sanitation concerns. Given that Menard is over 130 years old, it follows that plumbing problems will be ever-present, warranting an in-house plumber. The fault for this situation lies not with the DOC or Menard’s administration, however, but with Illinois elected officials who expect the DOC to somehow maintain century-old correctional facilities without adequate funding for maintenance and repair.

At the time of JHA’s visit, numerous inmates expressed distress over excessive heat and lack of air circulation in their cells. Reliable delivery of water is critical at Menard because of high temperatures in housing units in summer. This is a serious concern, particularly in the segregation unit where the cells do not have access to an outside window and are closed off from any airflow by a solid metal door. In the past seven years, two inmates have died due to extreme body temperatures caused in part by cell conditions.

On the date of JHA's visit, the temperature outside Menard was in the mid to upper 80's. However, it was stiflingly hot and oppressive standing in the common area corridor abutting the segregation cells. It is reasonable to surmise that the temperature inside the poorly ventilated segregation cells was even greater. Notably, the heat conditions in the general population housing and protective custody units that JHA visited were not appreciably better than in segregation.

Menard's administration indicated it follows a rigorous protocol to monitor heat in segregation and all the housing units. To that end, staff hourly monitors the temperature in each wing and records the temperatures in a log four times a day. If the ambient air temperature reaches 90 degrees, ice is distributed to the inmates. To its credit, the administration purchased individual fans for segregation inmates who could not afford to buy their own fans through the commissary.

Short of radically redesigning segregation housing, it is not clear what additional measures the administration could take to fundamentally change the temperature and airflow conditions. JHA approves of the administration's prudent practice of strictly monitoring temperatures in all the housing units.

At the same time, JHA remains concerned that the temperatures monitored in the housing units' common areas may not accurately reflect the temperatures inside the cells themselves. Presumably, the temperature inside the cells – specifically, the segregation cells – may be substantially greater than in the unit's common areas given their absence of ventilation and the heat being generated by people's bodies in extremely close quarters. As an added precaution, the administration should consider monitoring the temperatures inside the actual cells themselves.

Above and beyond monitoring temperatures in housing units, inmates who suffer from high blood pressure or heart disease, or who take certain medications for depression, insomnia or poor circulation should be identified and individually monitored and attended since they are at greater risk for heat-related illness.<sup>7</sup> If a protocol to this effect has not already been instituted, the DOC should do so immediately at Menard and all other DOC facilities without air-conditioned housing.

## **Physical & Mental Health Care**

A mixture of state employees and private contractual employees through Wexford Health Services provide dental, physical and mental healthcare to Menard's inmates. On the date of JHA's visit, there were eleven inmates housed in the medical unit, which has a capacity of 26.

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<sup>7</sup> See [http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat\\_guide.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat_guide.asp) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Extreme Heat Fact Sheet).

Nursing coverage is provided 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Medications are distributed by nurses who walk through the housing units six times a day escorted by correctional officers. According to medical staff, inmates seeking non-emergent care are generally seen by a healthcare provider within 72 hours of a request.

Number of Menard Inmates Diagnosed with Chronic Illnesses	
Asthma	372
Cancer	6
Diabetes	146
Hepatitis C	133
HIV	36
Hypertension	697
Tuberculosis	16 (no active cases)

Like many Illinois facilities, Menard suffers from chronic understaffing of nurses. Menard is authorized to employ 43 nurses, for a total of 1720 hours per week. At the time of JHA's visit, however, it was staffed with only 35 nurses, for a total of 1400 hours per week. Menard's administration acknowledged that recruiting nurses is very challenging, particularly given the state's slow hiring process.

Understaffing of nurses is a major factor that undermines inmates' access to competent healthcare. Registered nurses and certified medical technicians, not physicians, provide the bulk of medical care at Menard and most prisons. Nursing staff serve the frontline role of triaging, diagnosing, assessing, treating, and screening inmates to determine whether further assessment and/or treatment by a physician is warranted beyond nursing treatment.

When nursing staff levels reach critically low levels, allowing overextended nurses only a few minutes per patient assessment, grave oversights and errors are bound to occur. Notably, apart from reports of staff abuse, the most frequent report from Menard's inmates concerned lack of adequate healthcare; particularly, lack of access to referrals and treatment by specialists for unresolved medical conditions

JHA was very impressed with the nursing staff we spoke with, however, who seemed thoughtful, engaged, and sincerely invested in providing inmates with the best care possible under extremely difficult circumstances.

Compounding the problem of understaffing of nurses, the staffing level of physicians at Menard is also extremely low. At the time of JHA's visit, Menard was officially considered to be "fully staffed" with physicians because its five "authorized" physician positions (for a total of 134 hours per week) were all filled. Broken down, this amounts to 723 inmates per physician. In short, it is clear that even at optimal "authorized" staffing levels, Menard, like other Illinois facilities, lacks sufficient healthcare staff to meet the needs of this sized population.

In line with other facilities, Menards's staffing levels for eye care and dental care are insufficient. At the time of JHA's visit, one part-time optometrist working ten hours per week was charged with meeting the eye care needs of Menards's 3,618 inmates. With respect to dental care, Menard is authorized for three full-time dentists (for a total of 120 hours per week); one full-time dental hygienist (for 40 hours per week); and three full-time dental assistants (for a total of 120 hours per week). At the time of JHA's visit, all of these authorized positions were filled with the exception of one vacancy for a full-time dentist. As a practical matter, this means Menards's remaining two dentists were each charged with the extraordinary task of addressing the dental needs of 1,809 inmates apiece.

At Menard, and at facilities across the state, root canals usually are not available to inmates to save damaged teeth. Rather, the quick, low-cost procedure of tooth extraction seems to prevail everywhere as a favored dental treatment. According to staff, the wait time for tooth extractions at Menard is about one week. The wait time for a simple filling is several months.

With respect to mental health, Menard is authorized to employ four full-time psychologists for a total of 160 hours per week. At the time of JHA's visit, there were two vacancies for psychologist positions. Accordingly, the facility was operating with only two full-time psychologists (for a total of 80 hours per week). Likewise, there were two vacancies for social worker positions. Although authorized to employ four full-time social workers (for a total of 160 hours a week), at the time of JHA's visit the facility was staffed with a total of two social workers (for a total of 80 hours per week). Menard was considered to be "fully staffed" with authorized psychiatrists, however, since it was staffed with four part-time psychiatrists (for a total of 64 hours per week, 15 hours provided remotely through telepsychiatry rather than in person).

Notably, one mental health staff member whom JHA spoke with expressed reservations about the benefits of using telepsychiatry as an alternative to in-person psychiatric evaluation and treatment. Specifically, the staff member found telepsychiatry to be counterproductive with inmates experiencing psychosis because these inmates unsurprisingly do not relate well to speaking with an image on a television screen.

### **Education, Industries & Vocational Programming**

Menard has almost no educational programming. At the time of JHA's visit, 26 inmates in the adjoining medium security facility were enrolled in Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes. A total of 305 inmates were on the wait list for ABE classes. Menard has no ABE teacher for maximum security inmates.

Apart from ABE classes, Menard had two GED classes available. In total, 43 inmates were enrolled in GED classes and 167 were on the wait list at the time of JHA's visit. No college courses are available at Menard. Vocational programming is also limited. At the time of JHA's visit, Menard offered one class in construction, in which 13 inmates were

enrolled, and two classes in job preparedness, in which a total of 16 inmates were enrolled. Menard's administration indicated that one of its top priorities is to increase educational programming.

Menard has several small but successful industries, including a knit shop, broom shop, meat cutting plant, foundry, highway work program and a recycling program. In total, 98 inmates were employed in industry assignments at the time of JHA's visit. An additional 568 inmates had non-industry work assignments.

JHA had the opportunity to visit the knit shop, which employs 43 inmates in making sweatpants, t-shirts and laundry bags. Impressively, the knit shop produced 8,355 dozen t-shirts the preceding year. Jobs in the knit shop are highly desired by inmates because they can earn greater wages there than in other industries. Inmates in the knit shop are paid in proportion to the number of items they produce. For example, inmates are paid 38 cents in total for sewing sleeves on every dozen t-shirts.

Staff indicated that the knit shop could be grown to accommodate 65 inmates in total. Efforts were underway at the time of JHA's visit to add 40 additional jobs for inmates to sew uniforms for correctional officers.

Another of Menard's successful industries, which the administration would also like to expand, is its recycling program. This program employs inmates in sorting and packaging reusable paper, cardboard, and plastics from trash. Remarkably, this program has helped Menard to reduce its outlay of garbage by 60 percent. Further, several inmates formerly employed in this program were able to obtain jobs in recycling upon release from prison.

At the time of JHA's visit, the administration was in the process of planning a composting pile for food waste so as to expand Menard's pilot garden project. In addition, the administration was exploring the possibility of employing inmates to extract biodiesel from cook oil.

Menard's administration was extremely vocal about the need to create more jobs for inmates, and its belief that jobs are the key to reducing recidivism and inmate aggression. To that end, the administration has employed inmates in a gardening project and in a mural project to commemorate Menard's many staff members who are veterans of the armed forces. JHA strongly commends Menard's administration for its creative and diligent efforts to increase jobs for inmates, while at the same time contributing to the environment and surrounding community through waste reduction. JHA further supports the administration's ongoing endeavors to grow its recycling and knit shop industries, and to increase inmate jobs across the board.

## **Library, Mailroom, Clerical, Security & Other Staffing Issues**

Like other Illinois facilities, Menard suffers from severe understaffing of clerical and administrative support staff, which negatively affects its ability to deliver essential services and undermines underlying security.

At the time of JHA's visit, Menard had 17 clerical staff vacancies. Four of these vacancies were in the mailroom, causing significant delays in mail processing. Several inmates reported mail delivery was behind or backlogged for several weeks up to a month and complained of privileged mail being opened or tampered with. Inmates also reported substantial delays in accessing library services. The administration acknowledged it was seriously understaffed in this area, as there were job vacancies for one library associate and three paralegal positions. The administration further acknowledged that inmates' complaints regarding delays in mail processing and delivery were valid and largely a result of understaffing. The administration noted, however, that some delays in mail delivery were the result of inmate-specific monitoring of mail by the FBI.

Severely understaffed with clerical workers, Menard's administration struggles to get by using temporary staff assignments to fill clerical positions. At the time of JHA's visit, the administration reported that approximately twelve correctional staff had to be redirected from security duties to fill essential full-time clerical positions, for a total of 1980 hours per month.

Although routinely overlooked by Illinois elected officials, underfunding and understaffing of administrative and clerical support positions is a serious problem. It undermines the capacity of correctional facilities to function efficiently and effectively and provide critical services to inmates. It can also seriously undermine safety where, as at Menard, a large number of correctional officers must be redirected from their regular security duties to provide clerical support.

At the time of JHA's visit, Menard had one vacancy for a correctional counselor position and was staffed with a total of 16 correctional counselors. Previously, correctional counselors' offices were centrally located in the facility, but the administration made the decision to relocate the counselors to the individual cell houses. This move has allowed inmates greater access to their counselors and, according to the administration, substantially cut down on the number of inmate grievances. Correctional counselors see the inmates on their assigned caseloads once every 60 days unless an inmate requests to see his counselor sooner.

Happily, the administration recently was able to fill a vacancy for a leisure time activities specialist, who was working towards scheduling inmate basketball games and better coordinating yard times at the time of JHA's visit.

## **Population & Facility Demographics**

The average age of inmate at Menard is 37. The average length of stay is one year, two months. Approximately 56 percent of the population is incarcerated for murder; 24 percent for Class X offenses; 7 percent for Class 1 offenses; 7 percent for Class 2 offenses; 4 percent for Class 3 offenses; and 3 percent for Class 4 offenses.<sup>8</sup>

At the time of JHA's visit, approximately 3054 inmates were housed in the general population; 434 were housed in the medium security unit; 414 were housed in disciplinary segregation; 80 inmates were housed in reception and classification; 41 inmates were housed in protective custody; 37 were housed in orientation; 11 inmates were housed in the medical unit; five were housed in the administrative detention reentry management program; and one inmate was housed in administrative segregation. Menard has 218 single cells; 1757 double cells; and eight multiple-occupancy cells.

Approximately 51 percent of the population was convicted in Cook County. The racial-ethnic makeup of Menard's population is roughly 63 percent African-American; 25 percent White; 12 percent Hispanic; .01 percent Asian; and .01 percent of other ethnicity.

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<sup>8</sup> In Illinois, offenses other than murder are categorized in descending order of seriousness and length of sentencing range as Class X, Class 1, Class 2, Class 3, or Class 4 felonies (with Class X being the most serious, and Class 4 being the least).

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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.



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