



County of Cheshire

12 Court Street, Keene, NH 03431
www.co.cheshire.nh.us

June 25, 2019

Jail Inspection Reports
First Semi-Annual Report
County of Cheshire
Director of Administration
NH Dept. of Justice
33 Capitol Street
Concord, NH 03301

**RE: Management report pursuant to RSA 30-B: 12,
Cheshire County House of Correction**

Gentlemen:

Pursuant to the above statutory requirement, the County Commissioners for Cheshire County are pleased to submit the following report on their examination into the management, condition and security of the inmates in the county correctional facility. Following is our written report to you of the findings and actions or proposed actions on such findings, as recorded within the Public Meeting Minutes of the Board of Commissioners, recorded at the time of the meetings.

June 12, 2019: 1st Semi-Annual Inspection

At 11:21AM Master Agenda Item #686: Semi-Annual Inspection of the Department of Corrections as required by RSA 30-B 12 was taken-up and the Commissioners began the inspection tour of the Department of Corrections physical facility and its operations.

At 11:23AM The Commissioners and staff, escorted by Correctional Office Scott Mclaughlin, entered the Visitation area in the building's lobby. It was discussed that the video visitation system is used heavily for inmate visits and that the cost is set at \$5.00 for each 20-minute visit. Mclaughlin said that even local families and friends of inmates have been using the system as it saves on travel time and costs and offers the same type of interaction as they would have if they visited on-site.

At 11:26AM The Commissioners entered the Booking Area and Mclaughlin said that as the facilities Federal Liaison Officer he has seen many other jail and prison facilities and most of them are sub-standard when compared to the County facility as they are not as well managed and are in general less clean and with some in disrepair. The role of inmates on the facility cleaning crews was discussed as well as how the holding cells are used and how incoming arrests are processed. In response to a question from one of the Commissioners Mclaughlin discussed how the restraint chair is used when needed to restrain out-of-control individuals being processed but said it has been quite a while since it was needed.

At 11:33AM The Commissioners entered the Sally Port (garage) area and inspected one of the inmate transport vehicles and discussed the weapons training for the Correctional Officers.

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At 11:37AM The Commissioners entered the rear hallway to the medical area and proceeded to inspect the Property room and noted how neat and clean the room is and the lack of any odors. Mclaughlin said that was due to all clothing worn by inmates when they are arrested are thoroughly laundered after they are processed so that upon release, they have clean fresh clothes to change into upon leaving the facility.

At 11:41AM The Commissioners then stopped at the Video Arraignment room and Mclaughlin described the use and purpose of the room and said that it is used frequently, when and where it is appropriate, as way to reduce transport of inmates thus saving on time and costs and increasing safety.

At 11:44AM The Commissioners entered F Block where female inmates are housed. Mclaughlin said that the census for F Block was higher than normal due to 5 or 6 inmates that were transferred from the Belknap County jail as a contingency in anticipation of potentially needing extra space due to the Bike Week events being held in the Laconia area. The Commissioners spoke to some of the inmates and examined a cell.

At 11:51AM The Commissioner entered the Medical department and spoke with the on-duty staff and viewed the layout of the department and viewed exam rooms and office areas.

At 11:56AM The Commissioners entered R Block (segregation and incoming holding areas) and spoke with the CO staff on duty. Mclaughlin explained that all incoming inmates are held for seven days before being placed in population to ensure that the detox from drugs and alcohol is successfully completed. It was noted by Commissioner Wozmak that some of the flooring in the unit is experiencing premature wear failure. The staff will investigate options for remediation or replacement as necessary.

At 12:04PM The Commissioners entered S Block that houses inmates who have been sentenced and the Commissioners inspected a cell and discussed the use of sentenced inmates for facility work crews and the use of electronic monitoring programs for those inmates who qualify for outside employment while serving their sentences.

At 12:11PM The Commissioners entered the facility Maintenance space and discussed the operation of the buildings heating and cooling systems with particular focus on the geothermal installation. The present study of the thermal efficiency of the system was discussed and the study being completed by staff at the University of New Hampshire was covered.

At 12:20PM The Commissioners entered K Block and spoke with some inmates and with Superintendent Van Wickler who was present in block when the Commissioners entered.

At 12:26PM The Commissioners entered D Block and spoke with the Correctional Officer (CO) on duty and inmates. In response to questions from the Commissioners, the CO reviewed the procedures in place for responses to fires and explained the evacuation process.

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At 12:37PM The Commissioners entered the facility Control Room and spoke with the CO on duty who explained the operations of the control panel and how the cameras, automatic doors locks, and other security devices work during normal operations and under emergency situations.

At 12:44PM The Commissioners entered the Laundry room and McLaughlin explained how the laundry operated and the schedule that is in place for inmate clothing and bedding changes.

At 12:50PM The Commissioners entered the facility Kitchen area and met with the kitchen manager who reviewed the general operation of the kitchen and spoke to the recent replacement of the old steam kettle with an electric kettle and said that the new unit was much more useful and far cheaper to operate than the old unit. The number of meals prepared each day (approximately 460) was discussed and the staffing of the kitchen was reviewed.

At 12:56PM The Commissioners entered one of the facilities events rooms to conduct inmate and staff interviews.

The first staff member Correctional Officer (CO) #1, entered the room and the Commissioners introduced themselves. The CO *was informed that the Commissioners are required by RSA to conduct semi-annual inspections of the County Department of Corrections and one of the areas they are most interested in is staff and inmate perceptions of the not only the physical plant but of the managerial and operational issues, both positive and negative. The Administrator said that everything that was said in the interviews would be confidential and would remain so if the interviewee's wish it to be kept confidential. This was subsequently explained to the other three persons that were also interviewed by the Commissioners.*

CO #1 said that they are a fairly new employee and is under the Group I retirement plan and doesn't have any issues being in Group I instead of Group II as some of the older employees are. They said that the job is be very personally rewarding and that they take great pride in their work and always tries to go the extra mile. The CO said that they had received a promotion that would remove them from the union and that they were fine with that issue. The CO said that their father was a CO for about thirteen years and is now a police officer and that they have a number of friends who work in the Massachusetts correctional system, mostly in the Maximum Security units, however they much prefers to make less money working in Cheshire County as a CO than having to deal with working in facilities that are in poor physical condition and that have hostile work environments between the inmates and Correctional Officers. They said that the relationship between the CO's and inmates here is one of mutual respect.

The CO said they are adjusting to a switch in shifts as they recently moved from second shift to first shift. When asked by the Commissioners how they thought the facility could be improved the CO said that an incentive for the employees to be able to participate in an on-going exercise program would be a well-received added benefit.

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The Commissioners thanked CO #1 for their comments and input and at 1:06PM the CO exited the interview room.

At 1:09PM Inmate "Matt" entered the room and following introductions and being told of the confidential nature of the meeting began to discuss his views and perceptions of the facility.

He said that he is looking forward to leaving the facility with a few more career skills than he had so that he can find a job when he is released. He said that he is thirty years old but has been using drugs since he was fifteen. He told the Commissioners that he hopes to be released on July 17th and will then enter a rehab program at the Serenity Center. In response to a question about his background he said that he is from the Hartford Connecticut area and that the County facility is far better than being in the Hartford jails in every way. He said the only thing he misses is being able to go outside but that he did like the exercise areas in the housing blocks as the windows can be opened and the fresh air is nice. In response to a question he said that he ended up in the Cheshire County jail when he was arrested for 5.5 grams of methamphetamines and that he had tried to run from the police. He discussed the medical treatment that he is receiving and his medication plan and his progress to date.

He discussed his multiple felony arrests and said that all of his prior arrests are related to his drug use. He then discussed that it was very hard to change because finding a job with his record was very difficult. He said that as he has matured, he realizes that he needs to change and has set a goal of training to become a drug counselor and then hopefully at some point, becoming a Licensed Drug and Alcohol Counselor (LADAC). He said that he has a semester of college and hopes to be able to return to school and that the County Drug Court program is something that he is interested in qualifying for.

The Commissioners commended "Matt" for his honest answers and encouraged him to pursue his goals and aspirations as drug rehab counselor.

At 1:22PM "Matt" exited the interview room.

At 1:25PM Correctional Officer #2 entered the interview room. Following introduction and a short orientation for the reason for the session, CO #2 explained that they are a new transfer to first shift and are much happier than when they were on second shift. CO #2 said that because they have three children, and that they are very glad that to have the option to occasionally swap shifts with other staff to be able to care for their kids. The CO said that they have been at the facility for about ten months and has been getting a lot of training. They explained that one of the recent training sessions was on CPR and the Heimlich maneuver which they had to use on an inmate that same day during the noon meal. It was learned that the CO's immediate response likely saved the life of the inmate and that they have been recognized for their actions. The CO said that they spent eight years in the Army as a truck mechanic and that they learned of the Correctional Facility as an intern student. The CO said that they attended the in-house certification academy and that the program worked very well for them.

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