

## **State employee prison union say AOCI escapes a result of understaffing and overtime**

Leaders of the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association (OCSEA), the largest state employees' union, say the recent escapes from Allen-Oakwood Correctional Institution (AOCI) didn't have to happen, and were a result of too few staff and too much mandatory overtime.

"It's a perfect storm. You can't be 70 officers short and mandate entire shifts to work 16 hours a day over and over in a prison. It's not safe for staff or inmates. It has consequences. And in this instance, serious consequences. We've said it before, and we'll keep saying it. Something's got to give," said OCSEA President Chris Mabe, who worked for the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction as a Correction Officer and Sergeant for more than 25 years.

AOCI is running 70 Correction Officers short, and staff are being mandated to work back-to-back overtime. Due to excessive staff shortages, posts are routinely closed, putting more pressure on staff to oversee more and more inmates.

"Minimally, ODR&C should be reducing the number of inmate programs, curbing inmate movement, reconfiguring visitation, all those activities that require extra staffing," said Mabe. "We can't continue to operate as if it's business as usual," he remarked.

Statewide, Ohio's prisons are 2,000 officers short, a number that rivals the days before the infamous Lucasville riot at the Southern Correctional Facility that caused the death of Correction Officer Bobby Vallandingham and nine inmates. It was widely understood that understaffing was a major factor in that uprising. In fact, "staffing levels" was one of the main considerations in a commission report outlining steps to take to avoid future occurrences.

Mabe also said ODR&C's focus on purchasing new technologies, such as body cams for Correction Officers, has been misplaced. "They need to stop supplanting people with technology," said Mabe. "First, technology like body cams is not going to stop inmates from escaping. It's not going to keep officers from being tired. It's not going to keep them safe. They're not effective. Let's spend our resources on what is effective: people," he said. "Let's focus on helping bring new officers into the field and supporting those already in the trenches," he said.

The union says ODR&C specifically needs to incentivize Corrections jobs by increasing the wage and compensation and making the jobs more attractive. "We can't get people in the door at the current wage rate," explained Mabe. "Remember, just a couple years ago Ohio's Correction Officers were staying in hotels, being exposed multiple times to COVID and working around the clock," he said. "And don't forget, they also were denied emergency pay. All these things have made it nearly impossible to hire and retain Correction Officers. And that's made the system more dangerous," said Mabe. "We don't have a problem paying police

officers. Why do we have a problem paying Corrections staff? It's time to pony up and fix this issue," he said.

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*OCSEA represents approximately 27,000 state employees who work in a wide range of security, regulatory, administrative, direct care, maintenance, customer service and other positions, including nearly 8,000 employees in the Ohio Dept. of Rehabilitation and Correction.*