

Testimony before the
Ohio Senate Corrections Subcommittee

131st General Assembly

Presented by: Jim Adkins

Ohio Reformatory for Women

Ohio Civil Service Employees Association/AFSCME Local 11

OCSEA Corrections Assembly, President

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Thank you Chairman Uecker and members of the Subcommittee for letting me speak before you today.

My name is Jim Adkins and I am a Corrections employee at the Ohio Reformatory for Women, where I have worked as a proud public servant for over 20 years.

I am speaking before you today on behalf of the Ohio Civil Service Association Corrections Assembly, where I serve as President to thousands of Corrections bargaining unit members across the state.

For the safety and security of the staff, inmates, and the communities where our Correctional institutions are located, OCSEA has always advocated that state tax dollars are better spent on fulfilling essential positions required to run Ohio's prisons safely and efficiently.

Understaffing and overcrowding has historically been a major concern for OCSEA, and, in fact, several of my union brothers and sisters provided budget testimony this winter, detailing the hazards, concerns and major on-the-job injuries that result when there aren't enough staff members to protect our prisons and the communities where they reside.

Thanks to those staff testimonials, the Dept. of Rehabilitation and Corrections has made the right choice to lift the 4 percent vacancy rate.

Putting more boots on the ground, filling positions with well-trained and dedicated employees, is exactly what is needed to make our prisons—and communities—safer.

This is definitely a step in the right direction, but there is still a lot that we can do to make our prisons safer.

Historically assault logs show that, while minor offenses are decreasing, serious assaults—meaning anytime a staff member requires medical attention—have been on the rise. Overall injuries due to force appear to be coming down since 2012, but it appears violence is shifting. The union has some serious concerns regarding isolated areas where injuries are spiking dangerously, including at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility, Ross, Richland, Lorain, Allen-Oakwood Correctional Institutions, and the Ohio State Penitentiary.

Also of major concern is that, even when a staff member is assaulted and required outside medical attention, only half of those incidents are prosecuted and only 30 percent of those assailants receive a conviction.

It was also recently brought to my attention that there are some serious breaches of safety at several of our facilities, including the Ohio Reformatory for Women and Richland Correctional, in which it has been approved by DR&C that inmates be left unattended by security staff while

on work duty. For example, inmates are continually dropped off at the Ashland County Fairgrounds and turned over to be monitored by fairgrounds staff for their day's work. Felonious assault, aggravated robbery and burglary are just a few of the convictions of these inmates who are being put under the supervision of folks who just don't have the training or capabilities to keep these inmates contained, and ensure that our communities are safe. I urge the committee to look into these breaches before it's too late.

I also urge your support of the public operation of our state correctional food service, which my Corrections sister Chris Minney will speak [spoke] to more specifically today. An OCSEA-run, non-privatized prison food service contract will result in a more efficient, cost-effective, sanitary and safer prison system for Ohio taxpayers.

Thank you for your time and I stand ready to take any questions you may have.