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Title:

Organization or Agency: Incarcerated in CT DOC

Topic: Meeting Date Not Listed

NA

Testimony:

“Lockdowns” are a regular part of doing time in the Department of Corrections. For the most part, a lockdown falls into one of several categories: medical, fighting, assault on staff, suicide, fire, escape, and even deaths. Each lockdown gets reported as a code with an assigned color for ease of transmission: white, blue, orange, yellow, red, green, and black/purple, respectively. While these codes are mostly considered routine, they do, in effect, shut the entire facility down—halting normal functions and operations—until the code is clear. Clearing a code can take anywhere from a matter of minutes, to an hour, to the remainder of the day. In very rare instances, the facility can be shut down for up to several days. Despite the interruptions they cause, lockdowns are to be expected as another part of prison life.

Since mid-May of 2025, though, there has been an added twist to the use of facility lockdowns that feels very much akin to cruel and unusual punishment. “Short staff” lockdowns, which occur almost exclusively on weekends, are implemented when there is not enough staff on duty to ensure safety and security, thus necessitating a lockdown. While being short-staffed seems like a comparatively minor cause for a lockdown, it carries with it all the same severe consequences.

The shut down of a facility entails a disruption of the daily routine of visits, recreation, and allotted time out of the cell, five and a half hours, that was enshrined as a right by the state of Connecticut in January of 2025. Such disruptions are difficult for both the incarcerated and our families, but understandable in the case of emergencies or crises. “Short staff” lockdowns, on the other hand, represent an easily-solvable organizational issue that the D.O.C., to date, has made no visible effort to resolve.

They seem to me cruel when you consider the families, turned away from visiting their loved ones after an hours-long drive. And they are strikingly unusual because they result not from the inmate population, yet it is us who bear the punishment and are forced to give up our rights, including precious visitation time and time out of our cells, in the process.

“Short staff” being used to justify a lockdown is akin to going to an open restaurant and being told that since none of the cooks came to work, you can’t order food. If such a practice wouldn’t be acceptable for a business, it certainly is unacceptable for the D.O.C.—a large, government-run entity—to not only utilize that reasoning, but then proceed to inflict a much crueler and more unusual punishment than simply being refused food service on its incarcerated population, based solely on the Department’s failure to coordinate employee schedules.

If it were not for the suddenness of these lockdowns, the inconvenience to our families, and the absolute disregard for our loved ones, we, the inmate population, could take them in stride as another one of the infamous changes within the D.O.C., also known as the department of change. However, the prevalence of these preventable lockdowns reflects a reality in which guards and prison staff’s last-minute time-off requests are valued more than the few rights extended to the incarcerated population.