

Allegheny County Jail Unannounced Inspection Report

Date of Inspection: December 21, 2024

Inspector: Bethany Hallam

Time of Arrival: 9:35 AM

Time of Departure: 12:05 PM

Overview

On December 21, 2024, I conducted an unannounced inspection of the Allegheny County Jail (ACJ). Captain Joseph greeted me upon my arrival and escorted me throughout the facility. The purpose of my visit was to address specific concerns raised by incarcerated individuals and their families, and to observe conditions within the jail.

Inspection Details

During my inspection, I began in the intake area, where I visited an individual whose family expressed concerns about injuries sustained prior to their arrival at ACJ. I found the individual in the pre-arraignment area of intake with visible bumps and bruises but otherwise in stable condition. Captain Joseph assisted in explaining the next steps in the jail process to the individual.

From intake, I proceeded to the kitchen area, where I observed several individuals working and engaged them in conversation. Many raised concerns about their conditions and needs. Some individuals reported delays in receiving beds in the Renewal program, while others shared medical issues. One person mentioned ongoing spleen issues and noted that recommended tests had been ordered but not administered. Another individual had been incarcerated for 50 days without a Gagnon 1 hearing. Several kitchen workers highlighted problems such as cold shower water in Pod 2A, which Captain Joseph acknowledged as an ongoing issue awaiting contractor repairs. They also expressed the need for mandatory breaks after breakfast shifts and access to drinking water during their long shifts, as they currently resort to drinking directly from the spigot. One person reported missing a civil hearing in another county because their incarceration at ACJ prevented their attendance, resulting in the forfeiture of money. Another individual noted that meeting minutes from Jail Oversight Board meetings had not been updated on their tablets since September 2024. There was also a request to investigate potential racial disparities in alternative housing assignments.

Later, I visited Unit 5B to check on a pregnant individual recently moved there from Unit 5MD. Her living conditions raised serious concerns. The cells and recreation area in her wing had a strong sewage odor, and the temperature was noticeably colder than in other parts of the facility. Her tablet had been confiscated for a day as a precaution after another incarcerated person requested assistance in contacting family, although she had no intention of complying. She had also missed commissary due to a hospital visit related to bleeding complications and was worried about missing commissary call-backs again the following Monday due to an upcoming court appearance. She reported inadequate medical follow-up despite showing blood in her underwear to staff daily, and expressed a desire to access her medical records.

Conclusion

The inspection highlighted critical issues affecting both the physical and mental well-being of incarcerated individuals at ACJ. The inhumane conditions, delays in medical care, lack of basic necessities, and procedural barriers demand immediate attention to uphold basic human rights and improve conditions within the facility. Additionally, I am concerned about the jail's unwillingness to follow the statute governing the Jail Oversight Board, which outlines guidelines for unannounced inspections of the jail. The statute reads, "During such inspections, the board shall interview a cross section of inmates, **out of the**

presence of the warden and his agents, to determine the conditions within the prison and alternative housing facilities.” While Captain Joseph was very kind, courteous, and helpful for the entirety of my inspection, I noticed that he was listening to my interviews with the incarcerated individuals and writing down the names of every individual I spoke with. If he did not hear their name when I asked them for it, he would stop them after I was done talking with them to get their name. When I asked him about it, he said that the jail administration told him that he must turn in a list of every person JOB members speak with during our unannounced inspections. Not a single part of my inspection was “out of the presence of the warden and his agents”, and was in fact the exact opposite of that.