

Unannounced Jail Inspection Report

Conducted by: Bethany Hallam & MAN-E

Date of Inspection: March 5, 2025

Time: 5:10 PM – 9:30 PM

Summary of Findings

During our unannounced inspection of the Allegheny County Jail, we observed numerous issues regarding basic living conditions, medical care, religious accommodations, visitation policies, commissary pricing, staff conduct, and overall facility maintenance. The concerns raised by incarcerated individuals highlight systemic failures in addressing basic human rights and operational inefficiencies within the facility.

Pod-Specific Observations & Concerns

4A (Intake Pod)

While on 4A, we observed significant concerns related to food quality and access to information. The dinner bread provided was stale and so hard that individuals demonstrated its inedibility by bouncing it off the ground. Many incarcerated individuals lacked basic information about their cases, including their charges, who their attorney was, and when their hearings were scheduled. There was a recurring issue with tablet access, with some individuals going without a tablet for six days. GTL was not providing enough tablets to keep up with intake numbers, leaving individuals without a way to communicate.

Language accessibility on tablets was also raised, with requests for additional language options, including Portuguese and Greek, and a suggestion to install Google Translate. Additionally, reports surfaced that guards were questioning incarcerated individuals who spoke to us during our last visit, attempting to intimidate them to find out what issues they raised with us.

4E

Incarcerated individuals on 4E reported that they had not yet received their monthly stipend for March despite the board approving funds in February. There were complaints about not being allowed out of their cells after count when they were supposed to. Mold issues in the showers were raised, with a foul odor noticeable before even entering. Many expressed frustration over the recent increase in commissary prices, arguing that if prices were going up, the \$125 monthly stipend should be raised accordingly.

One individual reported being moved from a medium-security pod (3A) to maximum security (4E) after experiencing the loss of a family member, even though he had no disciplinary issues. He was placed in single-cell status and was not seen by mental health staff for a month. Another incarcerated individual expressed confusion over how to contact family members in Venezuela, highlighting ongoing issues with language accessibility and communication.

Facility maintenance was another concern, with individuals reporting that broken cells had gone unrepaired for two years, leading to unnecessary overcrowding. Issues with visitation were also raised, as there were only 20 visitation slots per week, and several phones were broken, further reducing access to family contact. Additionally, outgoing mail was reportedly delayed for weeks at a time.

In the fourth-floor hallway, we observed the Ramadan meals provided to those fasting. The meals consisted of tortilla chips, taco shells, two slices of bread, one slice of cheese, sandwich cookies, three dates, one bottle of water, peanut butter, jelly, apple juice, and cereal. While those observing Ramadan receive two trays when breaking their fast, the quality and substance of the meals were a frequent point of concern.

3A

The conditions on 3A were particularly concerning, with widespread complaints about [REDACTED]. Many incarcerated individuals requested transfers to other pods to escape his mistreatment, with some even reporting that they do things to get sent to "the hole" so that they can get away from him. Reports indicated that he frequently locked people in their cells at random and interfered with their ability to communicate with us during the visit. He seemed visibly annoyed that we were talking to incarcerated individuals on his pod, and verbally confronted us after locking the incarcerated individuals on the pod in for the night at 1950. He made an aggressive accusation that MAN-E was a "violent gang member" who "should not be on the Use of Force Committee". He attempted to start an argument, which we ignored.

Religious accommodations were another major issue. Ramadan meals and bagged meals were served an hour and a half late, disrupting the ability of Muslim individuals to properly observe their fast. Some also reported that the food provided in Ramadan bags was inadequate. Complaints about medication distribution were also raised, as nighttime medications were being given before dinner trays, which could negatively impact treatment.

Additionally, individuals expressed frustration over the pod's television programming, stating that it was always set to Fox News in the mornings and that they had no control over the channel selection. Information accessibility was another issue, with incarcerated individuals reporting that they still could not access the December meeting minutes on their tablets. Commissary problems were also brought up, including missing orders, price increases, and spending limits that had not been adjusted to match the increased prices. Some suggested increasing the spending limit since the raised prices effectively reduced their ability to purchase necessary items.

3D

On 3D, multiple individuals raised concerns about access to dental care. Many reported that instead of receiving fillings, their teeth were left untreated until extraction was necessary. They also spoke about the lack of preventative dental care.

Those participating in parenting classes expressed frustration that they were not permitted contact visits, even though individuals in GED classes were. This was particularly upsetting since the instructional videos for the parenting classes showed contact visits taking place.

Religious concerns were also raised, as Muslim individuals were not allowed to leave their pod for Friday prayer despite other religious groups being permitted to attend group services off the pod. Facility maintenance was another issue, with individuals stating that their pod's television had been broken for months.

Commissary pricing disparities were also noted, with Muslim prayer beads costing nearly three times as much as rosary beads.

1A (Women's Pod)

Incarcerated individuals on 1A raised serious concerns about medical staff, particularly a staff member named [REDACTED]. Multiple individuals with substance use disorders reported that she was dismissive, disrespectful, and made derogatory comments about addiction, particularly toward those suffering from xylazine wounds and withdrawal.

There was also concern about the limited job opportunities available to women. While men have opportunities to work in the kitchen and laundry, women are restricted to pod worker positions. Another significant issue was the placement of individuals with serious mental health needs on the women's pod instead of a pod with a higher level of treatment and care. This practice was causing frequent fights and unnecessary chaos.

Court transport accessibility was another concern. One woman reported that she had repeatedly been marked as "refusing court" when, in reality, she was physically unable to get into the sheriff's vehicle due to a disability. She requested access to video court as an alternative.

Additionally, we spoke with an individual who reported speaking to Karen Duffola, the Jail Oversight Board liaison, six months ago regarding a concern, but she has not received any updates since. She did not feel comfortable discussing the original issue in detail at that time but wanted to know if any progress had been made.

Conclusion

Throughout our visit, multiple concerns were raised regarding food quality, visitation restrictions, medical care, facility maintenance, and religious accommodations. Many individuals reported

receiving inadequate and delayed meals, particularly during Ramadan. Medication distribution was inconsistent, with individuals receiving their prescriptions late or not at all. Communication issues persisted due to a lack of tablets, broken phones, and delayed mail processing. Commissary price increases had further strained incarcerated individuals, as their stipends had not been adjusted accordingly, and spending limits remained unchanged.

Religious discrimination was a repeated concern, with Muslim individuals denied group prayer privileges while other religious groups were allowed to gather. Additionally, pricing disparities in commissary items for different religious groups raised further concerns about fairness. Facility maintenance was another widespread issue, with long-standing reports of moldy showers, broken TVs, and unrepaired cells contributing to an unhealthy living environment.

While these concerns remain pressing, it is important to note that some of the issues raised during this inspection have already begun to be addressed. Notably, the Incarcerated Individuals Welfare Fund Committee (IIWFC) has held a meeting with Deputy Clark to discuss improvements to language access, a major concern raised throughout our visit. Continued oversight and accountability will be necessary to ensure that these and other systemic problems are fully resolved.

Prepared by:

Bethany Hallam & MAN-E