

Unannounced Jail Inspection Report – February 6, 2025

Conducted by: Bethany Hallam & MAN-E

Time of Arrival: 10:50 AM

Escorted by: Captain Olean

Observations and Findings

Entryway Observations

Upon arrival at the Allegheny County Jail (ACJ), we noticed a Trump 2024 sticker prominently displayed on the entryway bulletin board. Given the facility's obligation to maintain political neutrality, this should be removed.

8E – Administrative Custody (AC)

Several incarcerated individuals expressed frustration over their indefinite administrative custody (AC) status, stating they had received no clear explanation for their placement. They undergo monthly Program Review Committee (PRC) hearings but were told they would remain on AC until they leave the jail. Some individuals were previously in the Restrictive Housing Unit (8E), then transferred to 6F, and later moved to 8E when 6F was closed, resulting in a loss of privileges without any explanation as to why.

Conditions on 8E remain concerning. Tablet access is limited to three times per week for two-hour sessions in the attorney visiting room. There is a lack of religious services for Muslim individuals, as the jail chaplain reportedly asks if they "want to pray" rather than providing an Imam-led service. Laundry is another issue, with white clothing items such as T-shirts and socks not being collected for washing, forcing individuals to hand-wash them in sinks. A loud fan is constantly running, making sleep difficult. Additionally, individuals on 8E cannot receive packages from family and cannot access the "Trinity Takeout" program.

Two individuals reported going on a hunger strike for five days in protest of their loss of privileges after being moved from 6F. This hunger strike was not communicated to the Jail Oversight Board, raising concerns about transparency.

During our visit, Warden Wingard, Chief Deputy Warden Estock, and Deputy Warden of Healthcare Holly Martin were present on the pod. Warden Wingard and Chief Deputy Warden Estock spoke directly with incarcerated individuals about their concerns.

7E – Juvenile Unit

We spoke with a child who reported completing his Restrictive Housing Unit (RHU) time the previous day. While his tablet and commissary privileges were restored, he remains restricted

from ordering through Trinity Takeout or packages. He also stated that no teacher visited him while he was on disciplinary status, which meant he had no access to education.

Children in disciplinary housing are kept in a separate enclosed section of the pod with limited recreation space. Another child had been in this isolated bubble for six months.

5F – Diversionary Treatment Unit (DTU)

The Diversionary Treatment Unit (DTU) is designed for individuals with mental health challenges who frequently cycle through restrictive housing. They receive four hours of out-of-cell time daily, split between two hours of structured programming and two hours of unstructured social time. However, during unstructured time, they must remain handcuffed to tables, which many expressed discomfort with. Some individuals stated they preferred the enclosed cages on 8E over being chained to a table.

Privacy is a significant issue in 5F. The cell doors have large windows, reducing privacy, and the showers lack doors, forcing individuals to bathe in full view of others. Other pods have shower doors, raising concerns about inconsistencies in dignity and privacy.

One individual in 5F reported being sexually assaulted by [REDACTED]. He claimed that multiple grievances he filed regarding the incident were discarded without investigation.

4D – General Population

During our visit, half the pod received hot meals while the other half received bag lunches due to the kitchen running out of food. This inconsistency could lead to tensions among incarcerated individuals. The warden later assured us that those who received bag lunches for lunch would be given extra trays at dinner, which we were grateful to hear.

Shower temperatures remain an issue. We checked multiple stalls on level four, and the water was freezing. This problem has persisted for months despite jail officials being aware of it and reported attempts being made to correct the issue.

There are ongoing delays in mental health services. Incarcerated individuals reported that mental health requests take three to four weeks to be addressed. One individual had been waiting three weeks to see a psychiatrist despite seeing a therapist biweekly.

Several individuals expressed frustration over the removal of the iHeartRadio app from tablets without explanation. Many also requested the return of sports-related apps.

Pro se defendants raised concerns about legal access. Legal mail is only available through their tablets, and some worry that jail staff may be monitoring their communications. One individual reported difficulty obtaining photocopies of legal motions necessary for court.

After receiving a single misconduct, another individual was removed from a halfway house list. He had never received a misconduct before and claimed that he had warned staff about

tensions with his cellmate, but they refused to move him. His cellmate allegedly attacked him, and when he defended himself, he was written up. Jail policy prevents individuals with misconducts from entering halfway houses, even though this is not a policy of the halfway house providers.

Conclusion

This inspection revealed numerous concerns regarding conditions within the Allegheny County Jail, including the indefinite use of administrative custody, inadequate access to religious services, poor hygiene and laundry practices, and environmental factors that negatively impact the well-being of incarcerated individuals. The failure to report hunger strikes, along with delays in mental health services and inconsistencies in food distribution, highlight serious issues in transparency and basic care.

The Diversionary Treatment Unit represents an attempt to provide an alternative to restrictive housing for individuals with mental health needs, but concerns over privacy and the practice of keeping individuals handcuffed to tables must be addressed. Additionally, allegations of sexual assault within the jail and the failure to properly handle grievances raise serious accountability concerns.

While some efforts are being made to address facility-wide issues, such as improvements to programming and administrative engagement, these conditions demonstrate the urgent need for further oversight, policy changes, and improvements in transparency to protect the rights and dignity of incarcerated individuals.