

Allegheny County Jail Oversight Board

Inspection Report

Date of Visit: March 22, 2025

Time of Arrival: 2:35 PM

Submitted by: County Councilmember Bethany Hallam

The purpose of this visit was to check on several incarcerated individuals whose loved ones or the individuals themselves had reached out to me through inter-office mail, phone calls, and other means of communication.

Upon arrival, I was greeted by Sergeant Brickley, who was courteous and helpful as always. Due to shift change, I waited briefly for Sergeant Costello to escort me into the facility. I was taken upstairs at approximately 3:00 PM.

Pod 8E

During my visit to Pod 8E, several incarcerated individuals expressed that they did not understand why they had been placed there. There appears to be a lack of communication and no formal documentation provided to explain their housing status, particularly for those under investigative or administrative custody. Many of the individuals had questions about how long they would remain in 8E and asked whether they could receive commissary, Trinity takeout meals, or increased access to tablets while on administrative custody. Additionally, I was informed that some cells on the pod had malfunctioning lights — either they would not turn on or would not turn off.

I spoke with CO Villella during this visit, who was especially kind and respectful. This positive interaction was appreciated and stood out given the general tone of the pod.

I recommend that the jail implement a consistent process to ensure individuals housed on 8E receive documentation that explains their status and provides a clear timeline or explanation for their placement. Consideration should also be given to providing increased access to commissary, meals, and electronic communication tools for those on administrative custody. Maintenance should be alerted to investigate and fix the lighting issues reported.

Pod 6E

On 6E, I met with an individual who shared concerns about her intake experience on Pod 1C. Despite disclosing gluten and lactose allergies during intake, she was initially given standard

trays that did not accommodate those dietary needs. Although this issue was eventually corrected after she was moved to 6E, she noted that there are still no lactose-free beverage options available. Milk is the only drink provided, even for those with dietary restrictions.

Several individuals also mentioned that they did not receive their medications during the intake process. These issues were reportedly resolved once they reached their assigned pods, but the delay in access to necessary medications remains concerning.

I recommend reinforcing allergy and dietary tracking protocols during intake to ensure individuals receive medically appropriate meals from the start. Additionally, the facility should consider offering alternative beverage options for individuals who are unable to consume milk. Improvements should also be made to ensure timely access to prescribed medications at intake.

Passages Program (Former Participant)

I spoke with a woman in the jail who had previously participated in the Passages program. She reported experiencing inappropriate comments from a staff member named [REDACTED]. She filed a PREA complaint and was supported by an advocate from Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR). She was assured that [REDACTED] would not be present in the program during her participation, and for several months, she did not see him.

However, just one week before her scheduled program completion date in November, she encountered [REDACTED] in the hallway. Feeling unsafe and betrayed by the earlier assurances, she chose to leave the program and was returned to the jail.

I recommend a full review of the facility's implementation of PREA protections, particularly around ensuring staff separation from individuals who have reported misconduct. It must be clear why and how this staff member was allowed back into proximity with the complainant after an agreement had been made. Communication, accountability, and survivor-centered safety measures must be strengthened.

Pod 5B / 4F (Medical Transfer)

While visiting Pod 4F, I spoke with an individual who had previously been housed on 5B and had a very serious medical situation. While incarcerated, he was prescribed Ozempic. Shortly afterward, he began experiencing severe side effects — including frequent fainting, vomiting, and at one point lying in his own vomit in his cell. He eventually collapsed, sustaining two black eyes and a broken ankle. Despite repeatedly reporting these symptoms to medical staff, he received no response or intervention until LPN Crystal Wagner stepped in and pushed for hospital transfer.

At the hospital, he was diagnosed with a collapsed lung and kidney failure. Hospital staff reported that based on the extent of the kidney damage, it was unlikely his kidneys were healthy at the time he was started on Ozempic. They emphasized that he should never have been prescribed the medication in the first place. Additionally, the individual reported inadequate water intake during this time, which likely contributed to the severity of his condition.

This case raises serious concerns about medical screening, hydration protocols, and timely intervention. I recommend a thorough investigation into the prescribing process and a reassessment of the intake medical screening procedures. The jail should also ensure that hydration guidelines are in place for all individuals prescribed medications like Ozempic. I want to especially commend LPN Crystal Wagner for her advocacy, which likely saved this individual's life.

Pod 3C

I conducted a check-in with another incarcerated individual on Pod 3C. No urgent issues were reported during this conversation, but it was part of a routine follow-up initiated by a prior communication.

Summary & Closing:

This inspection revealed multiple areas in need of continued attention — particularly around communication with incarcerated individuals, intake and medical procedures, and the enforcement of safety protocols like PREA. At the same time, it also highlighted positive examples of staff showing empathy and initiative, including Sgt. Brickley, CO Villella, Sgt. Costello, and LPN Crystal Wagner. Sgt. Costello was a very pleasant and helpful escort, and did not violate any of the provisions of the JOB statute that previous escorts did.

As members of the Jail Oversight Board, it is our duty to ensure that the facility operates in a way that is safe, humane, and transparent for all people incarcerated at the Allegheny County Jail.

Respectfully submitted,

County Councilmember Bethany Hallam

Allegheny County Jail Oversight Board Member