

Good Afternoon,

Understanding you read tons of email and legislation, I tried to trim this down as much as possible.

I am a probation and parole officer in Newport. I have 17 years of state service under my belt. I have worked hospital coverage in Newport, Burlington and most recently in Dartmouth. An email was sent out seeing if there were any volunteers as probation officers in the southern part of the state were all being ordered to cover for hospital duty. There were three incarcerated individuals that required security staffing. Myself and another co-worker ended up working from 11pm-7am Friday (after already working our regular day), 3pm Saturday until 7am Sunday and then Sunday working 3pm to 11pm.

I worked enough overtime last year because of the staffing shortage to put me in another tax bracket. I worked the hours in the facility to help out my co-workers. I had not been in a Correctional Facility since 1999. These Officers are exhausted, mentally and physically and sooner or later there is going to be a disaster that will bankrupt this State. Either by an Officer or an incarcerated individual's family that sues the State because their loved one died. It is not if it will happen it is when it happens, this State has been lucky so far, but luck only holds out for so long. I pray that it doesn't happen. I have been watching the hearings and just wanted to reach out.

Staffing issues have been occurring for years.

What exacerbated it within the last 3 years include COVID, and when our government threatened changes to the retirement system. The number of people that retired earlier than expected I believe would shock you. People that had 3-4 years left bought out the rest of their years before our government changed what they were promised when they became State employees. Vermont lost 1,000's of years of experience because after working all those years, dedicating their lives to the people of Vermont, our government was contemplating stripping them of what they were promised. So, like anyone else they protected what they had and left.

There were staff that had over 30 years in State government that had no desire to retire, loved what they did, and wanted to continue working, left because of the fear of losing the retirement they were promised. That in the last two years had the biggest impact on staffing in all of State government.

Corrections

Leadership- staff need to have someone at the helm that is knowledgeable about what we do. We can't have people at the helm that learn on the job. It is too important for someone to learn as they go.

How many Directors does one agency need? It seems like every other week/month there is an email saying someone was promoted to "Director." How many people are required to do the jobs at Central Office. There was a time when I looked at the names on a three-page list and some people didn't even have a job description, and had no idea what they did at Central Office.

With the staffing shortages, those that are at Central Office that are still certified to work in a facility should be required to work one day a week in the facility covering a shift to help out. Or taking a shift when hospital coverage occurs. Leadership speaks volumes when those you supervise see you willing to pitch in and help so they can get a break. DOC needs to use **all** resources available until this issue is fixed.

At my office I have complete confidence in my management. All four individuals that have a supervisory role over me are competent,

knowledgeable, transparent, and I trust them. I trust them to instruct me on new policies and procedures. They are leaders, they don't ask more from me than they are willing to put on the table. They admit if they did something wrong and make me feel like a valued employee. I am thankful for my leadership at Newport Probation and Parole.

New Staff Need to be told the whole truth. Northern State shift bid was done, staff were not allowed to bid on the "gravy" spots that included weekends. When the new staff came on board they were plugged into those spots. Now with shift change occurring again those new staff don't have shift bidding rights and are going to get what's left over. Basically third shift, no weekends and days off more like Tuesday/Wednesday or Wednesday/Thursday with no chance of a weekend off to spend with family for possibly 3-4 years. Unless they put in a leave slip that more than likely will be denied because of seniority. New staff are not told that so when this occurs what do they do—they quit, as they feel like they were lied to and not given the whole picture.....

Staff that Left= reach out to those that left and give a bonus for coming back, bonus for staying a year. See if they are willing to come back.

New Hires: Some are coming from out of state, or leaving a job, at the end of the first week of the academy, if they are a brand new hire and have not been shadowing at the correctional facility. cut them a check for 500.00 for completing the first week on top of what they will get paid two weeks later, I have seen some new hires eating only what is provided by the academy and breakfast from the hotel as they don't have a paycheck. Wondering how they are going to get home because of not having enough gas money. It could be each paycheck after they are working full time pays back 25.00 a paycheck until that 500.00 is paid back so this program can be self-sustaining and not a burden on any budget. Show new hires that we are a team.'

Salary- being comparable to surrounding states so that when people are trained, they don't apply to a neighboring state because of better benefits and pay. Vermont appears to always want to be the "leader" in the country for whatever is happening, well let's be the leader in valuing and investing in our employees. We are correctional professionals, and should be compensated as professionals.

Changing the culture

This is getting better but has a long way to go. I teach at the academy and tell the new employees all the time, the officers you are going back to are amazing people, but they are tired, they are stressed, they are overworked to the point of exhaustion. Don't judge them and don't take what they say right now to heart. They are amazing people that have been through the ringer. Give Corrections a year, there will be good days and horrible days but give it a year, if after a year it isn't for you, that's okay, this job is not for everyone.

We have to change the culture of mistrust in our leadership- by putting competent and proven leaders in those roles- no longer the "mess up move up." Boots on the ground, that is what we need, not butts in a chair Monday morning quarterbacking what was done over the weekend.

Investing in the Facility Training Officer There is a FTO program, but it is not what it was when it was created and with the staffing issues it can't be implemented as it should. They should be individuals that are held to a high standard and compensated for it. They should be what others strive to be. I heard there was talk the Department is looking to have a Correctional Officer 3 position, maybe that should be the FTO. Helping new staff acclimate to corrections, being a mentor, teacher, the go to for new employees. Learning the rules and regulations, policy, and procedures. This person will give officers that solid base to work from instead of throwing them in a unit and saying, "good luck."

Lastly, look at what is working and what is not working in other areas around the state, trim the proverbial fat to invest it elsewhere. More bang for the buck.

Finally, the State must stop handing out all the freebies. Everywhere you look there is a program for something, but not a lot for empowering people to learn a trade, go back to school, or to engage in a job.

I always said that if someone has a job and they can't quite make expenses then help them out. I would rather supplement their income if necessary because their paycheck doesn't quite cover the bills, instead of paying entirely for someone to stay home and not do anything and live off the backs of those of us who are

working. This State needs to incentivize working and stop rewarding able bodied individuals by basically paying them to stay home.

\$10,000 to help people relocate. Instead of giving people \$10,000.00 to relocate here, invest in those that are already here, keeping those that are already invested in working in Vermont continuing to work in Vermont.

Daycare- there are a lot of single parents and two income families that can't afford daycare. They get more money staying home than working-via reach-up, three squares, fuel assistance, programs paying their rent and utilities- the State and Federal government is giving no incentive to work and plenty to stay home and do nothing.

Use the empty building around the state to open daycare centers. It may cost to refit the building, but the "bones" are there to move forward with.

Staff the centers with individuals that are retired. Social Security alone is not cutting it. Vermont needs to end taxing social security and allowing people to earn more than allowed at this time.

Staff the centers with college/high school students, allowing them to earn credits via CCV towards a Human Service career. This would also help them build a resume for a job moving forward. It may also spark a high school student to become a teacher, counselor, or a daycare provider themselves.

Look into a program to pay extended family members to watch the children if daycare is not available. Finding daycare for third shift work is next to impossible. Put criteria in place for payments, proof the person is gainfully employed and not being able to access childcare easily and it would be a hardship for the child ie: getting up extremely early to get to childcare. Having to show proof of a paycheck of 30+ hours or more a week before the family member gets paid.

Taxes

No one should receive back from the State in taxes more than they paid in. Plain and simple. The money the State is not "dishing out" can be used for specific purposes, like subsidized day care, investment in rural transportation to assist people in getting to work, and investment in internet access for people to work from home because of a lack of transportation.

One of the barriers for being able to work is the ability to reinstate their license- maybe the taxes that are not getting paid out for those that didn't pay any taxes, can be put towards grants to programs like the Impaired Driving Rehabilitation Program and the Safe Driving course- where the class can be from 400.00-450.00 for IDRP and 50.00 for the Safe Driving course. That class, depending on the charge or tickets that someone receives, is mandatory to get their license back. Getting their license back means being able to drive to a job.

If you have gotten this far, I thank you for reading, I thank you for listening to the front line correctional professionals that are coming before you to educate you on what is really happening to them. It takes courage, strength, and a commitment to the citizens of Vermont to tell you "the rest of the story."

Respectfully submitted

Patricia Bennett- citizen of the State of Vermont who is also a State Employee, my views are my own, and do not represent the views of my office or the Department of Corrections.