

Feedback from Corrections Staff

(Educator in Newport): As an educator, I am not subject to the same overtime as the COs who protect me. I see how the uniformed staff suffer physically and emotionally. Lack of staffing and staff members who have worked too many hours are a safety risk for our communities. My brave and conscientious coworkers deserve uninterrupted time off with their families and reasonable workloads so that together we can meet the goals of our agency.

(COI, Springfield) : Springfield, we are down to under 40% staff. We are definitely in crisis and we lost the majority of staff that walked out the minute our budget changed. The minute you took away overtime after eight hours. Everyone was at the same conclusion that it is not worth it it's a hard job even when it's done on regular hours And now, with the loss of such a substantial amount of money, we will not be able to retain staff

(COI, Springfield) I'm a soldier in the US Army Reserve and I'm currently deployed over seas, away from my family and my home. Every couple weeks it seems, I get automated texts and phone calls from my facility because a shift is so short staffed they need people to volunteer to come and work more overtime.

It's extremely demoralizing to know that after being away from my family and my home for 9 months, I'm going to come back to near constant overtime and standby days.

(Wellpath Employee) These officers are being worked to death. They are tired and their quality of life as a whole is being affected in a negative way. These officers can not even get a break to take care of medical needs. They see the inmates more than their own families. There is no work/life balance. These guys live here. They need the incentives back to attract and retain staff. It is unsafe for these officers to work like this.

(COII, Marble Valley) Mandatory stand by is destroying our family life and driving people out the door, and taking away double time on the days off only to be told we need to be on standby on our days off is horrible. I have to ruin my entire day with my family to wait by the phone for 3 hours of pay at %20 percent of my base pay. This is why corrections officer have such a high rate of turnover, divorce, and suicide. These stressors are why Corrections officers on average only live 2 years after retirement.

(COII, Northwest) Core comps aren't being completed because too many officers are burned out.

(CO II, Southern) We work a 16 hour shift every day we are scheduled to work. Not to mention being mandated to work on our days off. This affects our families as well as us. Something needs to be done as soon as possible.

(COII, CRCF) too many 16-hour shift and standby I can never get 8 hours sleep I work too much and no family time.

(COII, Southern) Our mental and physical health are deteriorating. I love this job, but my family and health are more important to me. Please help us.

(COII, Southern)

The staffing levels have been at a dangerous level for almost a month. Our facility is on a modified/complete lockdown due to staffing. Every staff member is working a 16 hour shift every scheduled day and called in at least one of their days off.

We are at the same number as staff as when we started emergency staffing. There is no help outside of a handful of staff from the field offices. Even with ordering all staff present for 16 hour shifts we still don't have the staff for normal operations. That is a function of the 2-2-3 schedule. Every time there is a vacancy you need to fill it with four staff. The front the back and the middle spot leaving 2200hrs-0200hrs and 1000hrs-1400hrs. If you started your employment when the 2-2-3 you would be 23 overall in seniority out of 76 employees of which 56 actually show up everyday.

At SSCF we have lost 4 staff members to NH county jails for less pay, same job, and 8 hour shifts. When Travis Denton was at the facility all these concerns were brought up to him in great detail. We didn't have a crystal ball or could see the future but we knew than what we know now this schedule will not work. You need double the staff to fill this roster properly, four teams and two smaller swing shifts.

Yes, staff did vote on the schedule but it was only between five 12hr shifts(which turning into 16 everyday very quickly) or a 2-2-3. Continuing 8 hour shifts was never on the table. Covid limited our face to face visits as well as applications. We have hired 84 staff in the last two years and our hiring problems have been over for quite some time.

Anyone who was against 12 hour shifts moved to case work or the field, anyone who was close to retirement is still holding on as long as they can or retired. The department thought they could hire their way out of this problem and have been proven wrong despite staff warnings that the daily hours were too much. The concerns were placed at the feet of leadership with deaf ears and now that another crisis has arisen there is inaction from a self inflicted wound. The quality of life has gone down, with every PRIN survey supporting that staff suicidal ideations have been at a dangerous level. Until you make the facilities a priority, it will always be used as a farm team for the field and continue staffing shortages from a department who never meets with facility workers and doesn't plan to.

(COI, Springfield) I do not get much time with family at all. my daughter asks every day if I'll be home before she goes to bed and I never am. she just started school now I don't see her before she goes to school, and she is sleeping when I get home. i understand OT is a thing here but it's a 16 every single day now. and we make less money than we did before. we work more now and get paid less since the new contract. and that's a big part of the reason I believe a lot of people left and we can't keep any of the new guys. (She says since the new contract, the money was lost from the side letter expiring, not from the new contract)

(COI, Southern) Have no time to go to doctors appointments, family functions, do hobbies that help us relax and destress from these hours. Staff are being forced to work 16 hours when they are here, are being called in or forced to sign up for stand by and then have to come in on their other day off to keep up with trainings.

(Supervisor, Northwest) I have been here for many years, 99% of our turn over is because of the outrageous overtime. the 2-2-3 schedule only works because DOC will not pay OT until after the 40 hours. Officers are doing 16 hour days only to drive an hour home try to get some sleep, get up, get dressed and drive an hour back to work. Staff are lucky to get 5-6 hours of sleep. This is not sustainable.

(COII- Springfield) The poor conditions already communicated multiple times have directly led to the mass exodus of Corrections Officers from all facilities, and the physical/mental exhaustion of the ones who remain. These factors, which must have been foreseen, massively decrease Officer safety and well-being, not to mention the oft-advertised "work-life balance" of the 2-2-3 schedule. Despite enjoying my work and my coworkers, I am actively searching for other employment, as are many others who remain at SSCF. This situation must be addressed as your top priority, as Commissioner; and soon.

(Not a VSEA Member, Wellpath) Not me, but the hard working officers I work with everyday. As a mental health counselor, I can see how this is affecting the officer's mental health. Staffing needs to be our priority instead of mandatory overtime. It is degrading our officer's wellbeing and moral.

(Southern, supervisor)

The first thing I would encourage people to think about is the fact that facility staff are working 12- hour days every day they are scheduled to work. That is a long day to start with. Then they are ordered over or in early for an additional four hours. That makes a 16-hour day. With current staffing levels staff are actually working 16 hour shifts nearly every scheduled workday. Next are the regular days off. Staff regularly get ordered to work between four and 12 hours on their days off. I ask anyone reading this if they would sign up to work this schedule and subject their family, soon to be ex-family to this schedule.

Changes need to be made, we are approaching the finish line, and it looks like it may be a historical finish of failure.

(COII, Northern) The multi-year lack of staffing at my facility (NSCF) has led to profound impacts on the physical and mental health of staff and our families. We have been working frequent 16-hour shifts for the past several years, and recruiting efforts seem to be completely inadequate to make up the staffing shortfall. Officers are falling asleep driving home, and it is only a matter of time until there is a loss of life among staff or members of the community simply due to fatigue. Central Office appears to be operating in a sort of disconnect from day-to-day operations at the facilities and what we are experiencing. NSCF is currently (2024) losing more staff than it is hiring, which is not a sustainable situation.

(COI, Marble Valley) With limited time off due to working many 16 hr shifts and the added stress of being called in for stand by on days off, my quality of life has become worse. I spend my time off sleeping, not with friends or family and it's very frustrating.

(COI, Northeast) The advanced Order in book makes it extremely hard to plan anything with my family for the few days off from the facility.

(COI, Northeast) The amount of 16-hour shifts associated with this 2-2-3 schedule are beginning to feel like more of a punishment than a reward. It is true we may have half of the pay period off, but we are now being ordered in on our "days off" and also being forced to work late into our weekends and come in early off of them. That being said this schedule has zero opportunity for work life balance and has me looking for other employment opportunities.

(COI, Marble Valley) The staffing crisis has severely impacted the work-life balance I was promised upon hire. I've missed multiple family functions, religious meets, and other responsibilities due to the never ending "Ordered Over". My fear is that the new "Ordered Standby" will lead to me having to decide between work and family. The new changes have made it so that we essentially have zero days off. I enjoy this line of work, we have a great team, but the leadership is making it nearly impossible for Officers to have a healthy work-life balance especially for those with families. This cannot sustain. Officers will leave putting more stress on the already stressed staffed, families and incarcerated individuals. Please correct this.

(COI, Marble Valley) The "work/life balance" promised to us has been disrupted by mandatory OT and has negatively impacted mental health and relationships with family. Days off are no longer days off, time with children is being stripped from us on our "days off" and we are forced to tell our families that we are unable to commit to them. This is unacceptable and unsustainable.

(Newport Probation and Parole) I have seen far too many friends and colleagues forced to work insane amounts of overtime. This has caused the department to lose quality employees which has created an unsafe working environment currently but has also forfeited the future of the department by no longer having quality staff to ascend the ranks when the old guard has finally retired.

(Barre Probation and Parole) Being in constant fear of being ordered to work an overnight shift by myself. It appears the DOC are having staff cover people in the hospitals by using single coverage. People requiring a two person coverage Are being over ridden to a single coverage. This is a ticking time bomb. Staff are being put in danger in this situation. Incarcerated individuals have a custody level for a reason, and to think you can safely cover them with staff from the field or anywhere is putting that staff member in danger.

I also feel, VSEA needs to take a bigger stance on orders in the field on our days off. The DOC put together a special team to cover hospitals. Field staff are being ordered to cover hospital shifts on their days off. We are told the special teams are not ordered because they need their

days off for a healthy work life balance, but do not consider our work life balance. I for one do not mind covering hospital shifts, however, it needs to be done at my convenience to allow me to have a healthy work life balance. Volunteering for several shifts, then being ordered for an over night is not healthy.

(COI, Newport) Working as Peer Support Member, the number of contacts I receive has increased. The topic, the amount of overtime and the amount of stress it is putting on officers. Due to being tired and over worked they are verbally "attacking" each other. mistakes are being made, duties are not being completed. To defect blame, they go after each other. This resulting in even lower moral. All of this is one of contributing factors to the loss of staff.

(COII, Northeast) I'd like to invite those who are requiring so much of front-line staff to put themselves in our shoes. Really consider how the quality of your life would change if your home time was reduced to 6 hours total. If you're wondering where 6 hours came from, let me explain: This is the amount of time most of us have between 16-hour shifts after commuting each way. Compare it to your current situation. What would you have to give up? How would you prioritize that time? What would change? It's a lot, isn't it? During this time you need to sleep, shower, maybe eat.... Now, you're probably thinking it's only a few days in a row, there are days off coming soon and you can rest and recuperate. You would be wrong. Now most of your days off you're required to be on standby. What this means you wait for the phone to ring for 6 hours while being ready to run off to the facility at their beck and call for as long as they deem necessary. Compare this to House Arrest meets Russian Roulette. It's an unreasonable demand on our time. I know that this sounds bad but wait, there's more. Throw family, your children, your spouse and your home into the mix. What's left for them? You can forget about hobbies, sports, working out, children's events, community organizations, volunteering and the list goes on. For instance, I have sleep disorders that I can no longer take medicine for because I don't have enough time to sleep or get the medication out of my system, I cannot make the time to go to Physical Therapy. Discipline is disproportionately severe if one is unable to be ordered or unable to do Standby.

I for one did not sign up to give my life to DOC.

(COI, Northern)

In just the past 7 days alone, I have worked 80 hours without a day off because I am on stand by, and slept very little.

I have a wife and 3 young children at home who are crying daily as I leave for work early to work mandated 16 hour shifts. I have gained weight and barely sleep, my health both physically and mentally are declining. None of these things seem to matter to DOC, only that I show up to the facility and work as many hours as possible.

Staff is getting so burned out that we find ourselves bickering with one another when we are supposed to be a team. If something doesn't change you will soon find yourself with no staff at these facilities. DOC acts as if they own us and being in the facility is way more important than having any sort of family time, and realistically DOC is the cause of many divorces/separations due to the ridiculous workload that is put on us.

(Hartford Probation and Parole) I have run into issues with my marriage from the amount of time spent away from home due to the large hours I was doing at the facility. I have also experienced

the tiredness and the mistakes that can be made with this. The facility and department as a whole is much less safe when staff are exhausted. Staff will notice less and when they see a problem, they are less likely to do something about it. I have also seen staff so exhausted that they have gotten into car accidents on their drive to or from work. The incarcerated are treated more human than staff are. they are guaranteed 8 hours of sleep from 2200-0600 hours, and they even sleep during the day. Security staff are not. Security staff are only guaranteed an 8-hour turnaround from the time they clock out, to the time they clock in again. This includes travel time, eating, sleeping, hygiene, spending time with families, and any other business they need to attend to. 8 hours to drive home, eat food, spend time with family, shower, sleep, and drive back to work. Some staff live a considerable distance away. I myself lived a half hour from the facility before getting promoted. that's 1 hour of my 8 hours in just driving. I would walk into my house with only 6 hours of sleep left, before anything else was accomplished. This is inhumane and outright cruel to staff to be treated with this much disrespect. It's not livable for anyone to be doing this many hours and not having time for relaxing and time for family and personal business.

(Burlington Probation and Parole) I am here writing in support of my field peers across the state. We currently have 4-5 people at Dartmouth. I am not sure with that amount of coverage, even spread across multiple offices, how they can do hospital coverage and community supervision. POs have stated they are not volunteering for shifts as the travel time is no longer paid time. COS is insufficiently staffed and has been since the beginning to cover hospital shifts. No messaging other than "it will get better" has been conveyed.

(COI, Newport) Here at northern state on paper we are 70 strong but in reality we are 58 staff members boots on the ground, filling spots, working in units, that's 23 vacancies sees in the new matrix and we are expected to cover 23 vacancies with 58 staff members already working at their full capacity plus some

(COI, Southern) The staffing crisis in the VT DOC has persisted for years, compounded by hazardous working conditions. This situation is taking a toll on the well-being of employees and raising serious safety concerns for both staff and incarcerated individuals. The underlying causes of the staffing shortages must be investigated and addressed immediately, as temporary solutions are no longer sufficient.

(COI, Marble Valley) The amount of mandatory overtime that is expected of DOC employees is inhumane. It is ludicrous to have to beg for time off on your time off. Many of us have children, as a parent we are responsible for their health, education, safety, and supervision. I personally drive an hour and thirty minutes to my facility and then an hour and thirty minutes back home, add the hours worked and that doesn't leave very much time for much else. Now we are being ordered in on the days that we have off. The DOC trains us to protect the individuals that we supervise from being strongarmed and taken advantage of. Now they are strongarming their employees by forcing them to sell the time they have with their families. We have lost a few employees already and if this keeps up there will be many more to follow.

(COI, Marble Valley) The long hours and lack of stability in scheduling things outside work have caused morale to plummet. In turn causing some officers to not care about doing the job to the best of their ability. again, causing facilities to become unsafe for officers.

(Probation and Parole, Central Vermont)

- The “sit rep” numbers provided to the Legislature at the beginning of the 2/2/3 Schedule were skewed, and took into account people who weren’t working. The discrepancy between the number of folks “working” in Newport and the boots-on-the-ground daily counts was sometimes in the double digits— in terms of folks who could actually report to work if needed.

(Correctional Officer 1, SSCF)

- Since joining the department in Early 2024 the facility of SSCF was 80+ officers strong. The 2-2-3 schedule was looked at by me and my family as a promising balance of invigorating work with being an extra help to my family being home as an extra support and being there for my children’s lives.
- Since July SSCF has hemorrhaged staff, with nowhere near a flow of incoming staff to pick up what we are lacking, a recent academy class of 10 new officers is down to just 1 from that class. The question of the day is not “am I going to be hit for an over?” But wondering, “is there a chance I’ll only work 12?” This answer is nearly always no. Within the first 2 hours of a shift supervisors will contact us and inform us we are “getting hit” for day shift staff working 6 AM to 10 PM or leave at 6 to arrive back at 2 AM and work a 16-hour shift.
- The greater issue with 16-hour shifts is that while there is an 8-hour gap from when we leave to when we are due back in. This window does not take into account the commute home, the preparation for the next day’s work, meals, hygiene, and uniform being ready, in my situation with a 25-minute commute, my best case scenario sleep time is 5 hours and 30 minutes, most times I’m lucky to get 5 hours, just to come back and do it again the next day or thrice on a 3 day work weekend.
- The fatigue experienced by the end of these weeks on the actual days off we get, are spent recovering mentally and physically. And even worst coming into work for the next day we are not physically and mentally sharp as we should be to deal with the population entrusted by the citizens of this state to keep secured.
- We need relief. Too many good staff staying strong are faltering underneath a foundation that can’t support the mental and physical toil done each day wondering whether the final crack will be the next shift we find ourselves to be in. We need limits on the number of days in a row staff should work 16 hour shifts.

(Probation and Parole, Central Vermont)

- bring back double time for everyone working OT on their day off.

(Correctional Officer II, NERCF)

- Corrections Officers are quitting faster than they can be replaced. Some facilities are forced to order staff in every day for 16 hour shifts to include ordering them on their days off! Ever Since the side letter ended it has been like Noah's Ark with staff walking out the door, no one can blame them. NH DOC has taken some of our officers as they pay more, have a better retirement plan and benefits package. The bottom line is that Corrections Officers are just normal people with spouses, children, and friends, they need time off to make memories with loved ones. PLEASE HELP US! Thank you.

(Correctional Officer II, NSCF)

- Although we have never been promised safety in the facilities, the short-staffing is creating unduly hazardous conditions. In days past, I have been reassured that if an issue were to arise, I could call for help and be confident that several skilled people would arrive quickly and rectify the situation. That is no longer the case. There have been accounts recently of only one very junior staff responding to an emergency. Thankfully, it wasn't very serious.
- The 2-2-3 schedule sounded attractive in premise, but in reality it's not working. 12 hour days are rare as most days are 16 hours because there is not enough staff to make it viable. It is so much worse than the previous 5-2 schedule. People end up feeling like they've been the victim of a bait and switch scheme and they don't want to staff, thus worsening the crisis. Maybe a more aggressive compensation [package] would help."
- For me the 2-2-3 3 schedule, 16 hour shifts, and being on standby and frequently be called in on days off has been devastating. Days I work are devoted to work and sleep only— 8 hour turn-arounds, in reality, gives me 6 hours of home time after travel. How does one prioritize all the things that need to be done outside of work in that time? You can't. When I work 3 days it equates to 48 hours, with 8 hours of sleep split between shifts. It's not okay.

(Correctional Officer II, NWSCF)

- For many years now DOC staff have been working way excessive hours. I'm talking pre-Covid through now. These Mandatory OT hours should be exempted from the anti-spiking regulations. Not acceptable to force staff to work 40 hours of overtime a pay period for years and only allow half of those overtime hours to count toward pension calculation at retirement.

(Correctional Officer II, NSCF)

- Each facility has/had a "quota" for staffing levels in order to vote for a 2-2-3 schedule. The question I have is what is the number we have to hit in order for a change to occur

due to low staffing levels? I get we made a plan to go to a 2-2-3, but does the State have a back-up plan in case numbers dip below average? What number is that for each facility?

(Correctional Officer I, NSCF)

- The upcoming shift change at NSCF happens the end of this month and a new on-call list was e-mailed to all staff. this list includes staff having three days off in two weeks. this is not the work/life balance that has been preached to staff.

(Correctional Officer II, SSCF)

- I'm told for the 2-2-3 schedule to work as designed we'd need 120 staff. SSCF currently has approximately 48 security staff working the line. Due to the staffing crisis, we are forced to work 16-hours a day and usually two of our days off a pay period. In addition, we're also required to attend trainings on our days off. Therefore, we're only getting approximately two days off a pay period. There is no longer a work life balance. We no longer have any life outside of work. Staff are exhausted, sleep deprived, and physically and mentally broken. Staff are quitting stating the forced overtime was affecting their mental health and quality of life. We have been losing staff at an alarming rate due to these conditions. The facility has been getting locked down on a regular basis for days at a time due to staffing levels, which also affects the incarcerated population in many ways. SSCF has the highest amount of SFI inmates in the state. Being confined more than usual, has made the incarcerated population act out, threatening to hurt themselves or others, threatening bodily harm to staff, fighting amongst themselves and even faking a medical condition to get out of their cells or facility. We've had to collapse units due to under staffing, leaving one officer to supervise two pods of up to 110 incarcerated individuals. When the facility is in lock down, we're supposed to have a staff member in every unit. This rarely happens due to being understaffed.
- We've had several staff get into car accidents from sleep deprivation. One officer even crashed his vehicle on two separate occasions. I have experienced sleep deprivation several times, falling asleep in my vehicle at the facility after work, in my driveway after work, or in the break room before leaving work because I'm so exhausted. I've also caught myself dosing off behind the wheel on several occasions. On average, from talking with several staff the consensus is we're only getting approximately 3 hours of sleep a night.

(Probation and Parole, Central Vermont)

- Now because staffing is so bad at SSCF the field is now covering their off week to assist SSCF to get their basic daily scheduled med trips taken care of using field staff. Smart on DOC's part but now the field is essentially on standby 24/7 with zero breaks. We have

been told this is only going to last until the next Academy graduates but we all know this is just the tip of this particular iceberg.

(Correctional Officer II, SSCF)

- Until recently, we (security staff) have had to cover several medical transports causing a huge strain on the already dwindling staffing crisis. We've been left with one float to give on average 17 staff breaks, photocopy incoming mail, hand out razors, collect outgoing and facility mail, assist medical with med pass and respond to anything emergent. etc. etc.