

VSEA Facility Members Feedback

If you've had the opportunity to view the recent videos online, you'll see Steve speaking to the challenges within Vermont DOC. It's evident that many of these concerns are not being taken seriously. When legislators asked the Commissioner what actions have been taken to address this crisis, the only response offered was a reference to a "strategic plan" that, supposedly, would resolve these issues.

This was stated in testimony given during the spring of 2025.

We are now entering summer, and there has still been no response to the concerns brought forth by the Statewide Labor-Management Committee during our meeting last fall of 2024.

This ongoing silence is contributing to the already declining morale among staff and the growing rate of turnover across the state. This is a serious and escalating problem. Vermont DOC staff are continuing to endure mandatory 16-hour shifts—every shift—and are frequently being required to work on their scheduled days off.

This has been the reality for the past three years.

It is dangerous, unsustainable, and deeply concerning.

Where is the leadership to guide and support the dedicated staff who are burned out and continue to show up despite overwhelming fatigue?

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The staffing issue in my opinion is broken for two reasons.

1. Retention of experienced staff is not a priority. The Department would rather hire and train new staff that are under qualified in the first place with no care in how long they stay. Plus, standards keep dropping in order to keep this cycle going. What's the definition of insanity?
2. The Department continues to hire and promote unqualified people into leadership positions and this destroys the morale of seasoned employees, and the continued creation of new positions pulls staff from the facilities which are already struggling at lower levels. So, in closing, poor leadership, poor decision making and poor economy of force continues to affect staffing.

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Central Office is touting sufficient staffing at facilities, yet they keep recruiting people for COS. Central Office staff are not assisting with staffing vacancies at the facilities. We need the return of signing bonuses for new staff, and the return of a \$500 recruiting bonus for anyone who recommends somebody who gets hired.

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We are at 54 but that's including three that are leaving for St. Johnsbury in July, so you could say 57 for now. The *minimum* should be 79. There are many ways this affects staff:

16-hour days are common— usually 6 out of 7 days you're on shift. Caseworkers currently give up one day, so casework happens 4 out of 5 days. When the facility is this short there are times and days where the facility is completely locked down or on partial lockdown, so services do not happen.

VSEA Corrections Field Representative Feedback

- The feedback I have gotten over this last month revolves around forced OT. Staff at NSCF are working 16s nearly every shift they work. NSCF is in modified lockdown as a result. In addition to that the retention numbers are shocking; NSCF should have a minimum of 79 for the 2-2-3, right now they have fewer than 50. Increasing the numbers for the COS team has not had a positive effect on morale, as more and more of the best CO IIs are being poached to fill Central Office positions; it is cannibalism.
- The staffing crisis affects each facility differently. I believe the lack of staff and the mandatory overtime are the number one drivers of the retention problem that continues to plague this department. A number of the facilities have had to create a standby list so members never truly have days off. When a staff member tries to go on vacation, the days in conjunction to leave days they are subjected to being ordered. This makes it feel that the staff member is devoted to the facility on a 24/7 basis. This makes it very hard to commit to your family to go on vacation or fulfill any commitment to the family. For brief times during the time new staff are GAP hires are allowed to work shifts before going to the academy, an insanely bad idea, the staff get a break. The new staff member goes to the academy the facility returns to its crisis level of overtime. The new staff return, and then things get better. Then the new staff quit because the facility cannot tolerate the overtime. The effect of ordering people in on their days off because of the shortage is the number one morale killer, I hear, across the board. Working in the worst units where most new people are assigned is hard, especially when you are not confident or sure what you're doing. Twelve hours is a long shift in these units, and when it turns into sixteen hours and then your days off it is more than most families and individuals can take. We're not talking about a large number of people to make the situation way better. Just getting probation officers, retired CO, and people who are overtime exempt to come do shifts would help. If the department incentivized these people to come to the jail for a year, the entire employment situation could change