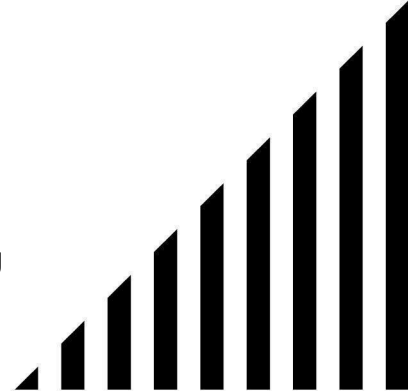


Tipsheet with reporting questions on prison staffing
Last updated on February 25, 2025



When a prison is not properly staffed, every aspect of the system is affected, including security and access to various services, family visits, and medical appointments. These issues often lead to dangerous working conditions for the guards who remain and can have costly impacts on state budgets. Here is a list of questions we recommend as a starting point for your local reporting on this topic, geared toward states that are seeing prison staffing declines:

- How many prison staff members and how many incarcerated people are there at every facility in your state? It's important to get this data for each facility instead of just asking for statewide data, so you can assess the unique conditions of every prison.
- When collecting data on prison staff, be sure to ask: How many staff members are guards and how many are in various support roles, such as front office staff, accountants, public information officers and medical unit employees?
- Does your state have a union for corrections officers or another association that advocates on their behalf? How strong is the union or labor association in your state? How strong are the labor contracts for corrections officers in your state when it comes to protections against mandatory overtime shifts, low wages and dangerous working conditions?
- Are guards in your region required to work double or even triple shifts? If so, how many hours does that entail?
- How much money is your state or region spending on mandatory overtime for corrections officers, and how has that changed over the past several years?
- How often are prisons being put on lockdown, and what are the specific impacts of those lockdowns regarding access to medical visits, hygiene products, medicine, educational courses, reentry programs, outdoor time and other services essential to physical and emotional well-being?
- How many reports of use of force by guards have there been in recent years? How many assaults have there been on staff members? Did these incidents occur during or soon after a lockdown?



- What has the response time been like for medical and security emergencies inside prison walls? Are appropriate staff able to arrive on scene quickly, or have there been delays?
- When were the prisons in your area constructed? Is their design outdated, requiring more boots on the ground to patrol a sprawling campus?
- Locking up people for minor parole violations, such as missing appointments, can cause additional strain on staff. Does your state have strict parole policies that are increasing prison counts?
- Is the decline in staffing in your state prisons causing overcrowding in county and city jails because people don't have anywhere else to go? And are those local facilities equipped to house the number of people who get stuck there?