
Survey Report



Analysis of 2023 MQPL Survey Comments

**Top issues reported by
respondents at Vienna
Correctional Center**

Vienna Correctional Center

Vienna Correctional Center (Vienna) is a minimum-security male prison within the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) that housed 562 people on January 3, 2023. The John Howard Association of Illinois (JHA) conducted a modified short [Measuring the Quality of Prison Life](#) (MQPL) survey by providing enough survey packets (consisting of the [MQPL survey](#), an informed consent notice/instruction sheet, and a privileged mail prepaid business reply envelope addressed to JHA) so that every person incarcerated at Vienna had an opportunity to participate in the voluntary and anonymous survey if they chose to do so. JHA received 119 responses to the MQPL survey from people at Vienna through July 5, 2023, representing approximately 21% of the static population.

This report highlights some of the most common issues raised in response to our MQPL survey question **"What are the most negative things about life in this prison?"** We selected this question to analyze because it is where most survey respondents chose to report the issues that they were experiencing while incarcerated. All survey comments for Vienna can be found in our [2022 MQPL Survey Comments](#) report. Quantitative survey results can be found in our [Vienna 2022 MQPL Survey Results](#) report.

Methodology

To identify the most common issues, we identified the most common words people used in response to the question "What are the most negative things about life in this prison?" For the Top Ten Words, all instances of each word and its plural form were counted (e.g., "program" and "programs.") Hyphenated words were counted as one word. Words like "the" and "not" were filtered from the analysis. Then, indicator words were counted under seven issue categories to determine top issues in each facility's survey responses. When an indicator word appeared within a longer word, the longer word was included. For example: the indicator word, "medic," picked up both "medical" and "medication." Prior to the issue analysis, the language in each report was standardized so that indicator words consistently appeared in a form that would be picked up by our software (e.g. "CO" was changed to "C/O," "good time" was changed to "good-time"). The indicator words by issue can be found [here](#).

To avoid double-counting issues, issue categories were only counted once per response. This means that the response "the cells are cold and dirty" would count as raising only one issue related to conditions, even though two indicator words ("cold" and "dirty") are used in the response.

There are limitations with this method, such as sentiment analysis. For example we are unable to distinguish statements such as "The doctor is good" and "I haven't seen a doctor." However, it is reasonable to conclude that instances of "doctor" are in a negative context in response to the question. Additionally, some indicator words that were frequently applied to multiple issue categories were removed. For example, we did not include "job" under productive activity because we could not distinguish statements relevant to the issue area, like "I can't get a job," from statements relevant to other issue areas, like "Staff don't do their jobs." Nor did we include "cell" under movement, e.g. "I am in my cell 24/7," because we could not distinguish from "School is always cancelled" or "The cells are too small" under this method of counting.

This report includes quotes from survey responses that we found to be either representative of the diversity of issues raised for each category or particularly insightful. Some quotes have been abbreviated to highlight the relevant issue.

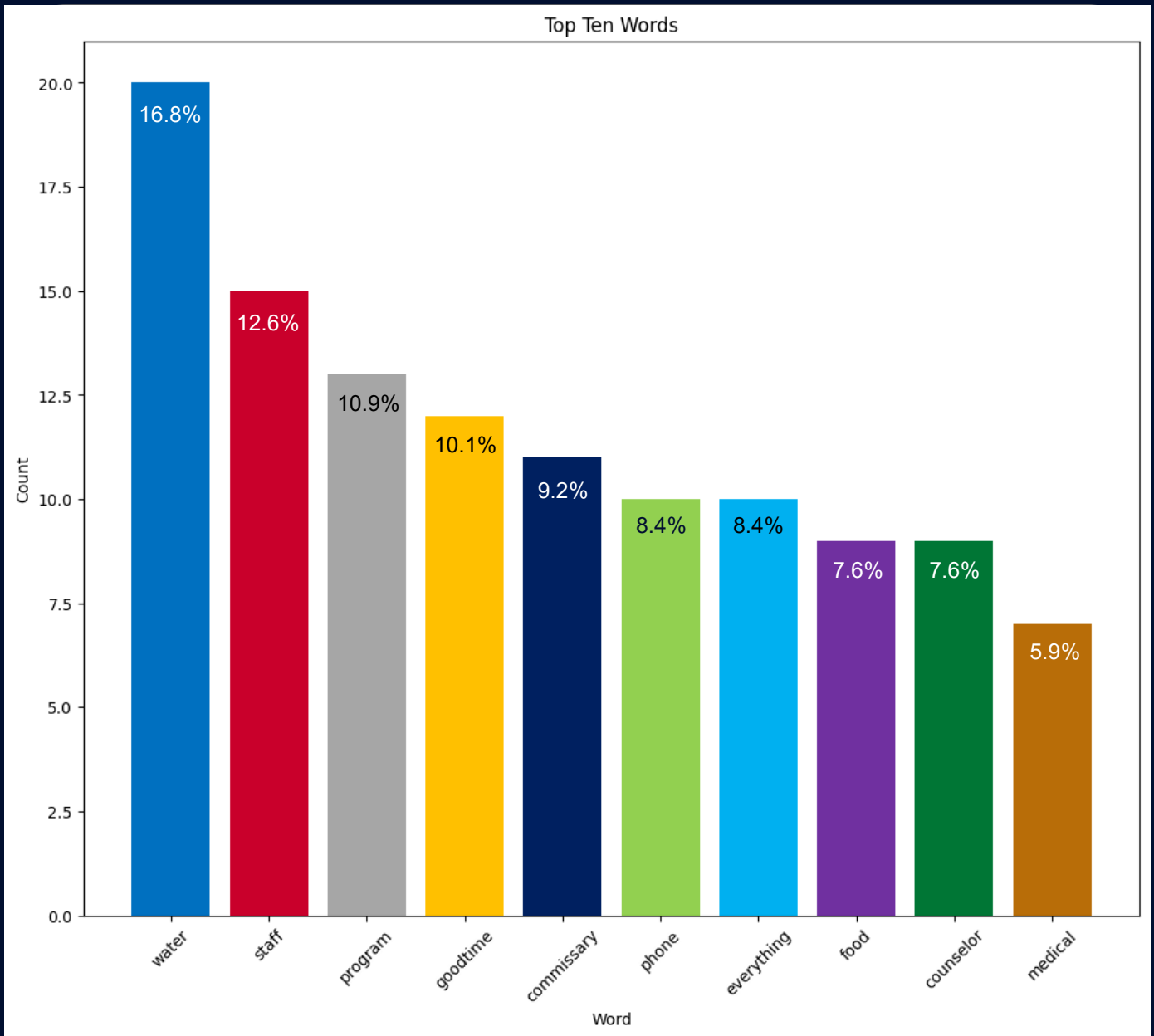
Word Cloud



Word cloud generated using the most common words used
in Vienna survey responses to the question
"What are the most negative things about life in this prison?"

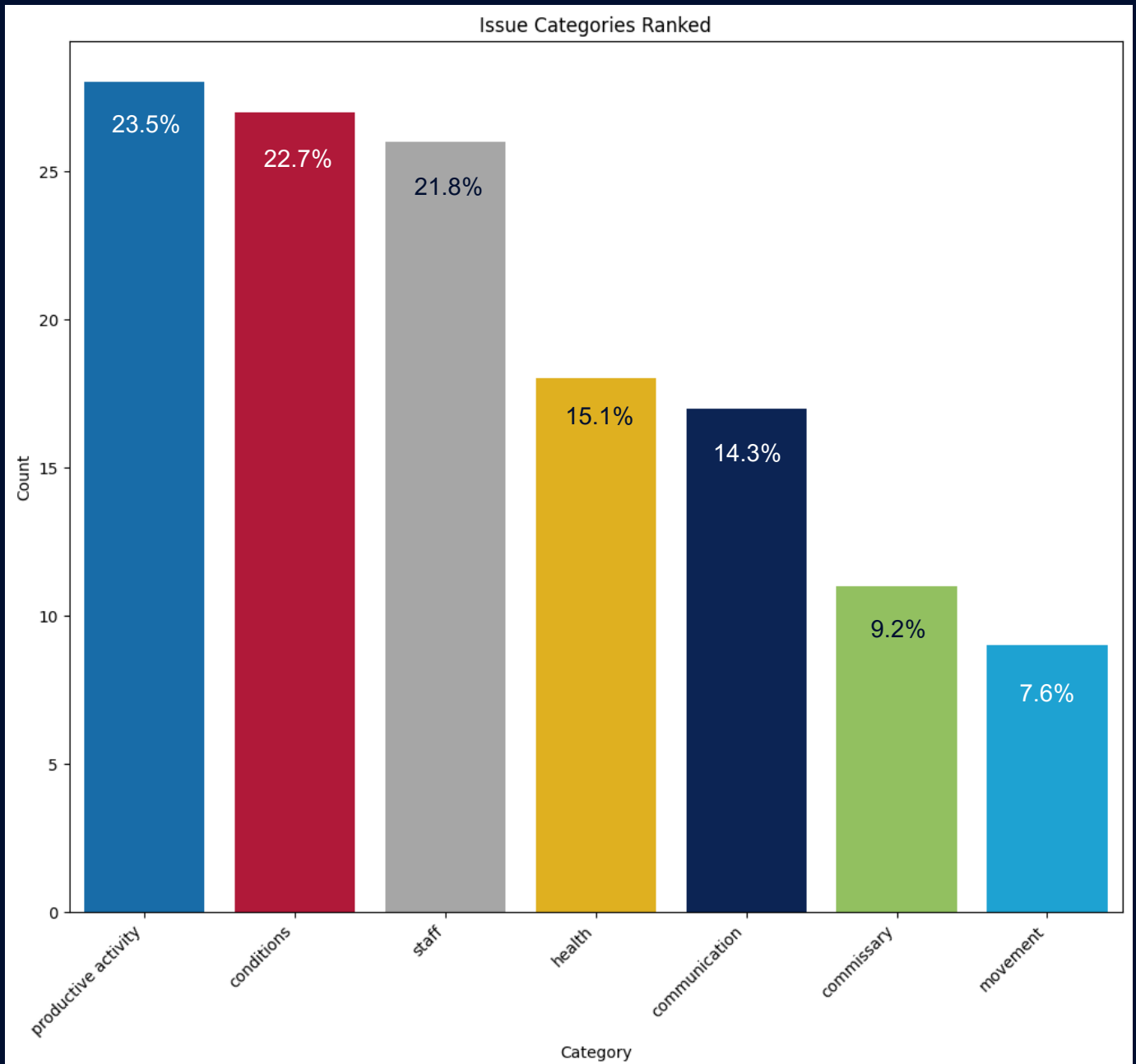
Top 10 Indicator Words

Used in responses to "What are the most negative things about life in this prison?"
Percentages are of the survey responses in which the word appeared.



Issue Categories Ranked by Prevalence

Issue rankings are determined by indicator word frequency. Common words used in survey responses have been sorted into seven issue categories. When a survey response uses one of a category's indicator words, it is tallied as raising an issue in that category. For example, a survey with the words "medical," "nurse," or "infection" is tallied as raising an issue related to health. Survey responses may include more than one issue. Percentages are of the survey responses in which an issue was raised.



Selected direct quotes from Vienna survey responses

1

PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITY

Includes issues related to productive activities, such as work assignments, education, or programming.

Not enough jobs. Not enough pay.

Because I'm 50% offender and Black I cant get a job unless I know someone.

It is hard to get the attention of any counselors and/or a response from anyone about programs or school. It seems impossible that this prison will allow me any opportunity to ~~learn and correct~~ correct myself and give the skills or certifications to become a productive member of society.

Not enough school programs or treatment programs especially alcohol + drug counseling.

Not enough jobs or programs to benefit majority, not a few or those on shorter terms

2

CONDITIONS

Encompasses issues related to living conditions, such as food, water, temperature, and sanitation.

Black mold on all the shower and bathroom walls. The water has lead and arsenic in it. (Water stays brown) Two man cells, should have single man cells.

the water here is brown, It is unsanitary, The showers are cold

The water is Gross and not enough cleaning chemicals Available to clean with.

The drinking water is awful.

Shower water is rarely hot.

3

STAFF

Encompasses issues related to prison staff, such as lack of staff or staff conduct

officers inform inmates of offenses to create unstable environment

The staff is most of the time disorganized and don't know really what's going on

Counselors not helping	(2) officers waiting		
Unfair disciplinary procedures	14 hours		

We are left on our own to reach for help... constantly. No counselor really care.

How C/Os treat you mainly Lt. [redacted] and how if you aren't liked you will be blackballed. You won't be available to nothing if you're disliked and there is A LOT of racism going on.

4

HEALTH

Includes issues related to healthcare, mental health services, and COVID-19 concerns.

I fear for my life by either poor medical attentions or the gangs running the deck/house

you do Not get adequate dental or medical care

No health care or Dentist care			
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Lack of proper & timely dental & medical treatment

It's been 3 months that I have waited for a doctor's appointment

5

COMMUNICATION

Includes issues related to phone availability, visitation, mail, and other means of communication.

Not enough phones on tiers!
Here there are (3) phones for 48 guys.

For a person from Chicago is hard to get real-live visits (is to far) And too many COVID restrictions. It dont allow us to interact with our family.

Lack of in person visits.

Contact with family very difficult with few phones and video visitation kiosk is always broken.

The way the phone system is governed by in custody

6

COMMISSARY

Encompasses issues such as frequency of shopping opportunity and item availability.

not being able to have the same store items as max + med.

commissary refusing men products/nutritional snacks or foods

new fans sold in commissary, clothing is bogus, not enough fans in summer

Commissary, there is never a whole stack of items available.

7

MOVEMENT

Includes concerns about time spent out of the cell or sleeping area and yard/dayroom availability.

No bathrooms on yard. The LTS (gym workers never here on nights or weekends so we don't get proper use of gym)

yard equipment, not enough yard time, not enough patio time

LTS is bogus, with all this movement and freedom, there should be positive things to get into besides being on the phone and dayroom all day

overcrowded dayroom



This report was compiled by JHA staff. Media inquiries should be directed to JHA's Executive Director Jennifer Vollen-Katz at jvollen@thejha.org or 312-291-9183.

Incarcerated individuals can send privileged mail to report concerns and issues to the John Howard Association, P.O. Box 10042, Chicago, IL 60610-0042. JHA staff read every letter and track this information to monitor what is occurring behind prison walls and to advocate for humane policies and practices. Family and friends can contact JHA via our website www.thejha.org or by leaving us a voicemail at (312) 291-9183.

Since 1901, JHA has provided public oversight of Illinois' juvenile and adult correctional facilities. Every year, JHA staff and trained volunteers inspect prisons, jails, and detention centers throughout the state. Based on these inspections, JHA regularly issues reports that are instrumental in improving prison conditions. JHA humbly thanks everyone who graciously shared their experiences and insights with us.



Defying Injustice. Defending Humanity.