

---

**Facility Report**



# **Monitoring Visits to Stateville Correctional Center 2022**

---

# Table of Contents

<b>Key Takeaways .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Physical Plant .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Staffing .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Population .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Programming .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Healthcare.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Minimum Security Unit.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Northern Reception &amp; Classification Center .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Commissary Update .....</b>	<b>33</b>

## Key Takeaways

1. Stateville max had a significant decline in its population in preparation to repurpose it as a multi-level security reentry facility.
2. Even with the lower population, staffing was identified on both 2022 JHA visits as a major pain point and was resulting in most incarcerated people having further restricted out-of-cell time.
3. While some people spoke positively about staff, others expressed that staff were indifferent to the conditions incarcerated people were living in or too focused on punishment.
4. The quality of water at Stateville continues to be a major concern for incarcerated people, who largely did not see the prison's process of distributing bagged drinking water—or its previous distribution of bottled water—as a satisfactory solution.
5. In addition to water, Stateville continues to struggle with longstanding maintenance issues, such as deteriorating buildings and the presence of mold and pests.
6. Stateville offered several programs that were popular with their participants, but these programs were limited to small numbers and there were perceptions of favoritism in access to them.
7. Incarcerated people continued to report that they did not have reliable access to essential items through commissary, such as food, hygiene products, and clothing.
8. Though the Northern Reception & Classification Center (NRC) and minimum-security unit (MSU) are newer than Stateville max, they also have numerous maintenance issues that require attention, some of which jeopardize the safety of incarcerated people.
9. Those incarcerated in the MSU reported issues relating to forced labor and were afraid that if they advocated for needed healthcare, they would be declared unable to work, sent to NRC, and subjected to long-term isolation while awaiting transfer to another prison.
10. IDOC does not publicly report data relating to length of stay for those incarcerated at the NRC, making it difficult to assess whether people are spending longer periods of time there than intended or what the obstacles are to timely transfer to a parent facility.

## Recommendations

1. Stateville's physical plant must be addressed. Living conditions negate other benefits of the facility, which include location and available programs. In the short term, IDOC should continue to reduce population in order to ensure that maintenance concerns that jeopardize safety are addressed.
2. The water and sanitation systems should be closely evaluated for potability and safety. Meanwhile, IDOC should consider other solutions to address anxiety and issues with bagged water delivery, such as providing those incarcerated at Stateville with water bottles equipped with filters at no expense.
3. Program participation and rotations should be increased to maximize participation.
4. Access to higher education opportunities throughout the state prison system should be expanded so that opportunities are not isolated in a few prisons, as was noted by the 2022 Illinois Higher Education in Prisons Task Force.
5. Necessary items such as weather appropriate clothing and items, linens, and hygiene products should be provided with consistency by IDOC, and commissary must be improved so that incarcerated people have the ability to supplement state provided items.
6. MSU worker conditions should be reviewed, and light duty work assignments for those with medical issues should be made available.
7. IDOC should avoid housing those awaiting transfer at NRC for long periods of time – it is a facility designed for stays of days, not months – and should publicly report length-of-stay data.

# Introduction

The John Howard Association (JHA) conducted two visits to Stateville Correctional Center and the Northern Reception and Classification Center (NRC), which houses the Stateville Minimum Security Unit (MSU), in 2022. The first monitoring visit was on April 6 and 7 and the latter on September 21 and 22. JHA was joined on the September visit by our independent correctional oversight colleagues from the [Correctional Association of New York](#) (CANY) and the [Pennsylvania Prison Society](#) (PPS).



Stateville is located in Crest Hill, Illinois, about 40 miles southwest of Chicago. The max was first opened in 1925. Stateville is the parent prison for the NRC and MSU, which opened in 2004. The max part of the prison and the NRC part are adjacent but largely physically distinct areas, although there is some population movement between them and they share a staff.

At the time of JHA's April visit, the population at Stateville max was 747. By the September visit, it was 498. Much of Stateville's maximum-security population had been transferred to other prisons as part of an Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) systemic reorganization and a

transition plan for Stateville to become a multi-level security prison focused on reentry programming, as discussed in [JHA's 2021 monitoring report](#). While lowered population had some substantial potential benefits, these were largely unrealized due to ongoing physical plant and staffing difficulties.

As IDOC implements their transition plan for use of facilities, it is impossible to overlook the major issues facing Stateville in terms of the dilapidated physical plant and extremely limited out-of-cell time, reportedly due to understaffing. In September 2022, Stateville reportedly had less than two-thirds of the 929 allocated security staff, which notably includes staff also for NRC/MSU and for substantial transportation needs, including medical and court writs.

Opened in 1925, Stateville max is one of the older IDOC facilities and presents myriad problems around conditions of confinement and the health and safety of people who are incarcerated there. Due to lack of routine maintenance, the facility is rapidly deteriorating. Things have continually worsened as JHA has observed and documented for years. Crumbling structures, leaks, and lack of pest control and ventilation all conspire to create living conditions that are inhumane and unsafe. Those incarcerated at Stateville have long expressed concerns about the tap water being discolored and having a strange taste, and have resorted to rigging up their own handmade water filters. Though IDOC maintains that the water is tested regularly and safe to drink, incarcerated people reported that staff do not drink it. The prison distributed bagged drinking water to all people at Stateville throughout 2022, with no end in sight.

**JHA was alarmed and disheartened by the lack of noticeable improvements in the six months between our April and September visits; if anything, physical conditions worsened.** Stateville is the closest prison to Chicago and benefits from many unique and valuable programs and easier access for many visitors—which has historically made being housed there perhaps preferable to some of the other prisons. However, we received a significant unsolicited response from people in surveys and through discussions on the 2022 visits supporting closure or at least temporary relocation for substantial renovation. JHA visitors from our sister organizations in New York and Pennsylvania also expressed that physical conditions were among the worst they had witnessed. Additionally, despite the NRC and MSU part of the prison being newer, these areas were not spared from water and other physical plant issues. While again JHA has reported regarding various issues including physical plant at Stateville for years, conditions at NRC and MSU also did not noticeably improve between visits

in 2022 and we again heard from individuals in the MSU (which would ordinarily be considered a more desirable placement) that many people did not want to be there. Anxiety amongst the population was heightened largely due to physical conditions.

In late October 2022, almost everyone remaining at Stateville max—nearly 400 people—were [temporarily transferred](#) to other Illinois prisons or to the NRC due to lack of a hot water in the facility. Stateville has two boilers which are part of the facility hot water system; one of them broke down in August of 2022 and had not yet been repaired when the second boiler failed in October, leaving the facility without any hot water. At the time of the temporary transfer, maintenance staff at Stateville were still waiting on a delivery of mechanical parts needed to make the repairs necessary to restore hot water to the prison.

With the 2022 assessment of IDOC's infrastructure, which was completed by an independent consultant and which JHA expects to reveal hundreds of millions of dollars in needed repairs throughout the system – with several hundred million dollars needed to address physical plant issues at

JHA is piloting an adapted version of the Measuring the Quality of Prison Life (MPQL) survey developed by the University of Cambridge Prison Research Center.

This instrument is an evidence-based tool used to gather input on the experiences and perspectives of people who are incarcerated on a range of different issues impacting their lives and the prison system.

JHA and our partner organizations CANY and PPS are working together to introduce this survey to prisons in the United States, starting with our own jurisdictions. The ongoing results and analysis of the survey will increase transparency and help guide oversight efforts.

JHA sent enough surveys to Stateville for everyone housed at the maximum-security facility (max) and MSU (excluding the NRC population) in advance of the September visit, and collected surveys in-person, as well as distributing additional surveys and prepaid return envelopes to people during the visit.

Additional survey results and analysis will be shared publicly when available, but some information from surveys received through February 15, 2023 is presented herein.

JHA received a total of 190 surveys from Stateville, a response rate of 31% of the 616 people incarcerated in the max and MSU at the time of the September visit.

Some people at Stateville requested that JHA make the survey results available to them on tablets, which JHA will request of IDOC, but the results will be made available on our webpage and can be printed and mailed in.

In late 2022, JHA also received permission to launch the staff survey compliment to the MPQL survey (known as the SQL) in November 2022 and will continue to seek staff input.

Stateville alone – and understaffing to the point it impedes functioning at IDOC’s prisons. **It is time to shut down old prisons that are not fit for habitation and to increase decarceration efforts in meaningful ways.**

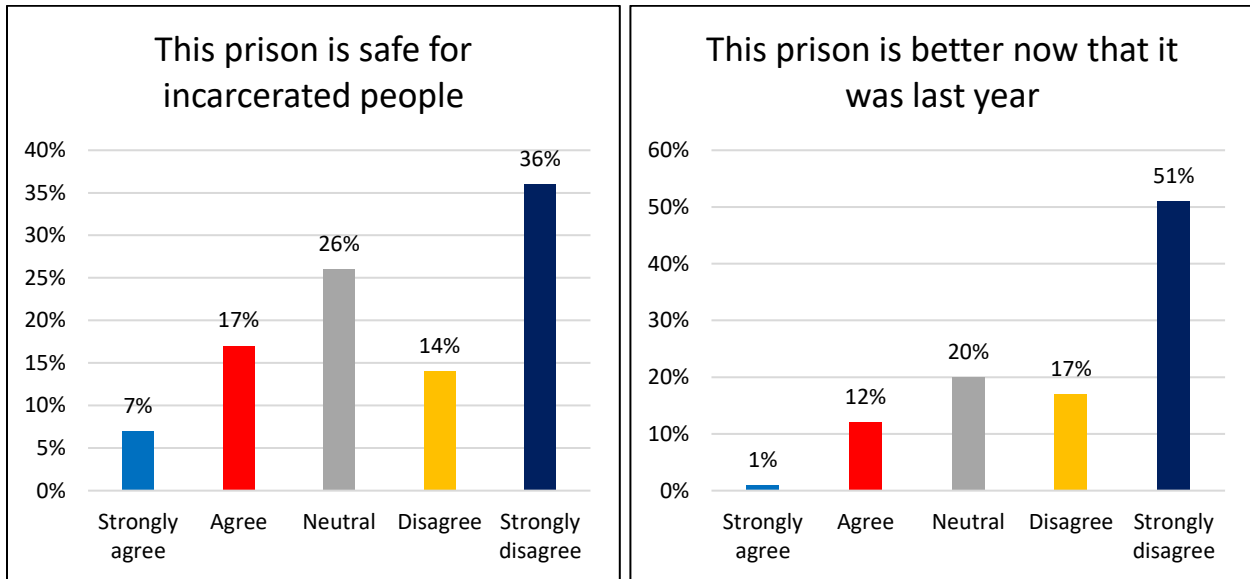
Both the recent failing of the hot water system and the safety and sanitation of the water system at Stateville have brought into focus issues that JHA and other advocates have been raising for years. Recently advocates, including JHA and environmental advocacy groups, have worked together to gather information on and better assess the water quality inside Illinois prisons. Longstanding and ongoing reports of discoloration, odor and other irregularities in the prison water causing physical reactions by those who have no choice but to drink and shower in it, have led to a coalition response to investigate and address water safety and sanitation issues. **Every person, whether they live in a community or are incarcerated, has a right to safe water.**

## Physical Plant

JHA has been reporting on conditions related to Stateville’s nearly hundred-year-old physical plant, such as pests and deteriorating plumbing infrastructure, [for more than the last decade](#). Additionally, class action lawsuits relating to conditions at [Stateville max](#) and [NRC](#) are ongoing. The condition of the physical plant was a major concern for those incarcerated at Stateville during both JHA’s April and September visits. While such issues are longstanding and well-known, the conditions relating to water—or rather lack of suitable water and plumbing situations—was extremely concerning to JHA, as well as the high level of anxiety among the population relating to these issues. Incarcerated people who spoke with JHA in September generally agreed that the conditions of the physical plant had noticeably declined in the past few years. Many of JHA’s survey respondents indicated that the issues with the physical plant were the worst things about Stateville: *“No hot water, no good water to drink, roaches, mold, etc.”* One respondent wondered, *“Is the state content to continue to put ‘Band Aids’ on serious maintenance problems, or [will they] invest in a new prison(s)? We live here, we live with these*



*problems day in and day out.*” On JHA’s 2022 MQPL survey, only 24% of respondents agreed with the statement, “This prison is safe for incarcerated people.” 68% of respondents disagreed with the statement, “This prison is better now than it was last year.”



The CANY and PPS visitors that accompanied JHA on this monitoring visit were struck by both the dilapidated condition of this prison as well as the frequency and intensity of complaints about living conditions from people incarcerated at Stateville. They noted that the deterioration of Stateville’s physical structure and the volume of serious concerns about living conditions stood out compared to prisons in their states (NY and Pennsylvania, respectively).

Most concerns from incarcerated people continued to stem from water quality. As detailed in a [November 2022 statement](#) on water systems in IDOC prisons that JHA was part of and in JHA’s [previous reporting on Stateville](#), people at Stateville have believed for years that the water is unsafe to drink, and both incarcerated people and staff have relied on bottled water. Someone during the September visit had secured a rag over the sink in his cell to act as a filter and showed JHA that the filter was stained brown. Similar setups were observed in the cells of other people incarcerated throughout the prison. During the April visit, administrators told JHA that water at the prison is tested twice a month by the Rural Water Association for lead and copper and was safe. Incarcerated people stated that in order to believe that the water was safe to drink, they would need to see the staff drink the same water. Someone also said that they would need the Environmental Protection Agency to verify its safety.

In early 2022, a test conducted by an outside source [revealed legionella](#) at several points throughout the prison including in an occupied cell, two unoccupied cells, and a sink in dietary. Reportedly, difficulty keeping bottled water in stock on commissary had prompted the facility to pass out bottled water regularly, rather than only offering it on commissary. During JHA's April visit, administrators reported that each person received eight 16-oz. bottles of water per day Monday-Thursday and twelve on Fridays to last them through the weekend. Bagged water was being used in the kitchen, and individuals incarcerated in one of the cell houses where a positive legionella test had occurred were showering in a different area due to concerns about possible exposure.

Incarcerated people reported that they did not have enough to drink over the weekend. Others pointed out that besides drinking water, they also needed safe water to shower. As one person noted about his concerns about bathing in possibly unsafe water, the skin is the body's largest organ. Other people expressed concerns about inhaling unsafe vaporized water in showers. Several people mentioned rashes. An individual who spoke with JHA in April reported that he and many of the people incarcerated at Stateville had issues with irritable bowel syndrome and constipation, which can be caused by dehydration.

Six months later, in September, individuals incarcerated at Stateville were still relying on supplied bagged water. Many reported that while the bagged water had tasted fine when they first started receiving it, it now had a chemical or soapy taste. Some incarcerated people were concerned that the bags were being reused and they were tasting the chemical that had been used to clean them. **One person reasonably suggested that those at Stateville should be provided with water bottles with filters on them. JHA recommended that IDOC seriously consider this suggestion.**

Incarcerated people expressed concern regarding dietary not using bagged water for cooking. Many expressed other concerns about dietary kitchen and storage conditions, and requested this area have outside health inspections as well. When JHA visited the area, staff explained that there were issues with mice coming in on skids and that they could not use poisons in food storage areas, and also noted that there had been a serious issue with cockroaches in the officer dining area but they believed the latest exterminator was "excellent." JHA appreciated that staff were forthcoming and that they deal with many of the same issues and have similar

concerns as the population in trying to maintain hygienic practices in antiquated spaces with limited resources.

In addition to drinking water issues, there continued to be many issues affecting plumbing. For example, JHA observed both unoccupied cells due to plumbing issues and places with constantly running water. JHA also heard individual issues regarding various plumbing issues in showers and cells (e.g., someone demonstrated that his toilet would not fully flush and he had a cellmate). Moreover, parts of Stateville max had reportedly been without warm water for months in September. Some people reported that they did not use showers due to poor condition or lack of hot water. An individual who responded to JHA's survey commented: *"No hot shower water since the first week of August. Had cold showers for 6 weeks—with no end in sight."* In October 2022, it became clear that the hot water system at Stateville max was not functional. Apparently one of the two boilers had been in a state of disrepair since August, awaiting needed parts in order to get it up and running again. As of October 26, **IDOC announced** that the second boiler failed, and since the first one had not yet been repaired, the facility was without hot water. At first IDOC obtained external shower units for the population, but quickly realized this was not a workable solution, resulting in the vast majority of the Stateville max population being temporarily transferred from their living units to NRC and other prisons for reportedly less than a week until the hot water situation could be resolved.

Additionally, on both 2022 visits, JHA again received concerns about mold in cells and showers, as well as reports of mice, cockroaches, and other insects in both cell houses and dietary. An incarcerated person pointed out an open window on a housing unit and told a JHA visitor that birds got into the cellhouse that way and defecated on the fixtures. Such issues have long been reported and observed. Several people again suggested that incarcerated people should have the opportunity to learn trades through working with tradespeople in the prison, which would enable them to do routine maintenance in their cell houses themselves. Someone responded to JHA's survey stating, *"The maintenance staff should have work crews who regularly perform preventative maintenance rather than wait until things are in a state of disrepair."* It is JHA's understanding that one of the impediments to this kind of programming and facility job placement for people who are incarcerated at Stateville is union rules and agreements that limit who can perform many of the maintenance jobs in ways that exclude people who are incarcerated. **If accurate, this should be looked into and addressed if it is to the detriment of everyone who lives and works inside this prison.**

The level of deterioration and decrepitude at this prison creates inhumane living conditions for those who are incarcerated and work there. **The State of Illinois must consider its obligation for the safe and humane treatment of people in custody as well as the responsible use of resources to address prison physical plant issues; where large, systemic improvements are needed, facility closure may be indicated rather than trying to use band aids to cover gaping wounds.**

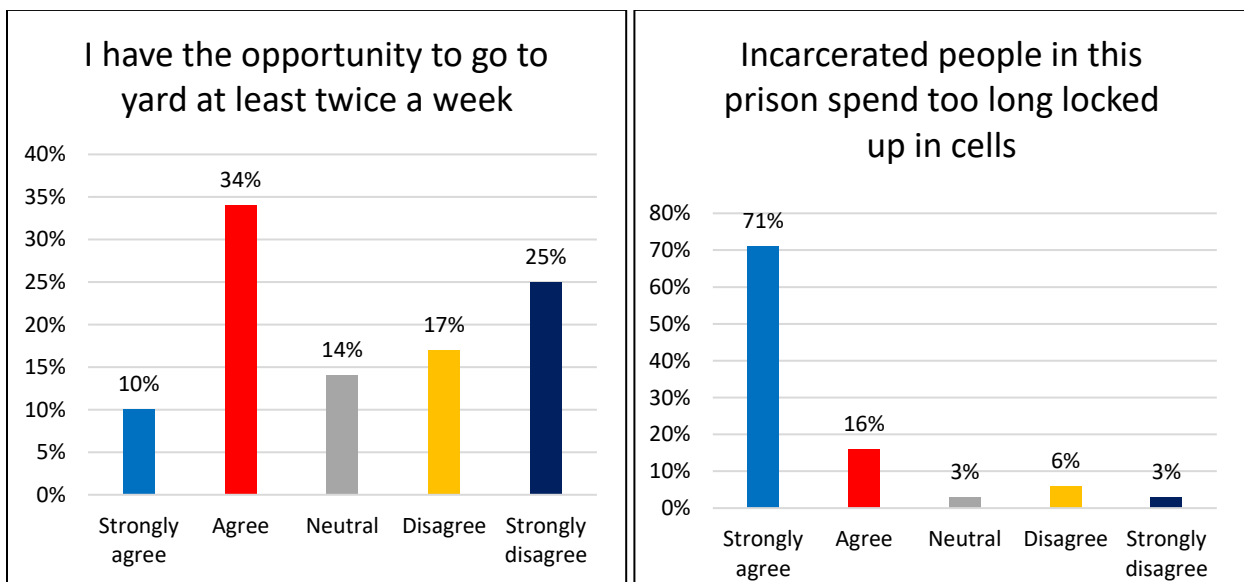
## Staffing

Staffing was identified by administrators as a major issue during both 2022 visits, despite population declines. At the time of the September visit, administrators stated that Stateville was allocated for 929 security staff but had a reported count numbering in the low 600s. Additionally, 58 security staff were on a leave of absence. Lowered population at the max reportedly did not necessarily alleviate much of the need for staff, as administrators reported that closing an entire cellhouse at the max only freed up about six staff. At the MSU, one of the housing units was closed, and administrators reported that they did not have enough staff to reopen that housing area. **As JHA has previously emphasized, it is important for IDOC to fill lower security bedspace, where ideally people have more opportunities to engage in productive activity and earn sentencing credits.** Additionally, as mentioned in JHA's [2021 Stateville report](#), because MSU is primarily the incarcerated workforce for Stateville, lower populations result in harsher work conditions for people who remain.

Administrators explained that while they had some cadets in training at the academy, they were losing security staff faster than they could train their replacements. Administrators acknowledged that some security posts had to be closed when they were short-staffed, meaning that opportunities for incarcerated people to leave their cells were more limited, but believed they were doing well considering the situation. Reportedly, Stateville had only experienced one full lockdown due to staffing in the 60 days preceding the September visit.

Nonetheless, incarcerated people reported less out-of-cell time compared to what they have previously received at Stateville max. Many people told JHA that they were only able to go to yard once or twice a week, and some also reported that they were no longer able to leave their

cells to go to dietary. A survey respondent stated: *“Sept. 15 through Sept. 18 there was no yards or chow. Left my cell only on Friday, Sept. 16 for a shower. Been locked up 3 full days.”* He attributed the situation to staff calling out of work. Another individual reported having a visit cancelled because there was not enough staff. **Several people expressed confusion that they were getting less out-of-cell time than they had when Stateville’s population was considerably larger.** Someone who answered JHA’s survey said that the worst thing about the prison was *“being in our cell most of the summer due to staff shortages.”* Another person wrote, *“We are constantly having our yard cancelled every week with little rec time. It is a very bad situation [without] being able to go outside and enjoy yard.”* **42% of those who responded to a question in JHA’s MQPL survey about whether they had the opportunity to go to yard twice a week replied that they did not. 87% of question respondents reported that people incarcerated at Stateville spent too long locked in cells.** Unfortunately, such reports regarding lack of recreational and other opportunity in IDOC due to short staffing are not unique to Stateville or other maximum-security prisons.



Administrators speculated that the staffing challenges were caused by a lack of interest in working in a correctional environment as well as the difficulty of the job. Notably, IDOC does not vary its pay scale based on the cost of living in the area where each prison is located, meaning that the salary is less competitive in Northern Illinois (where Stateville is located) than in more rural areas. If other jurisdictions have found varying the pay scale based on cost of living in the surrounding area to be a useful tool in staff recruitment and retention, Illinois might consider

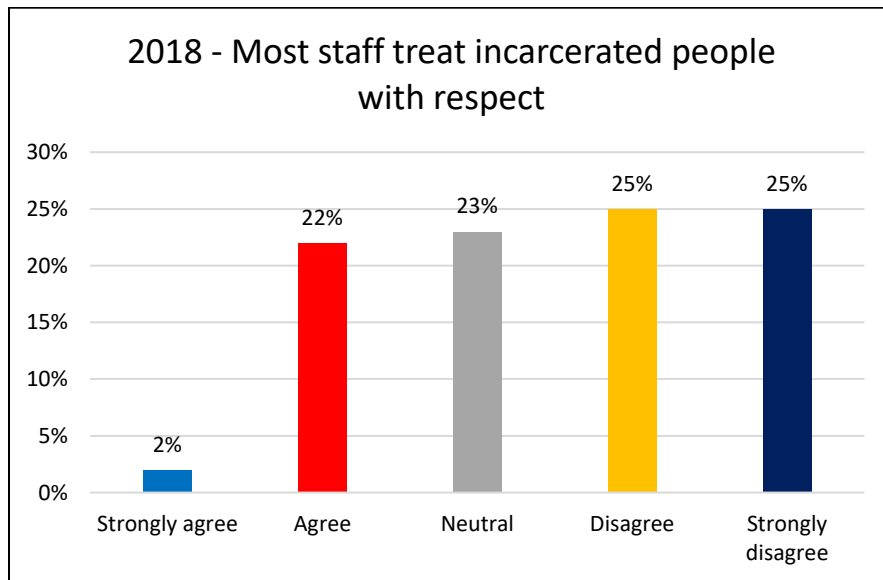
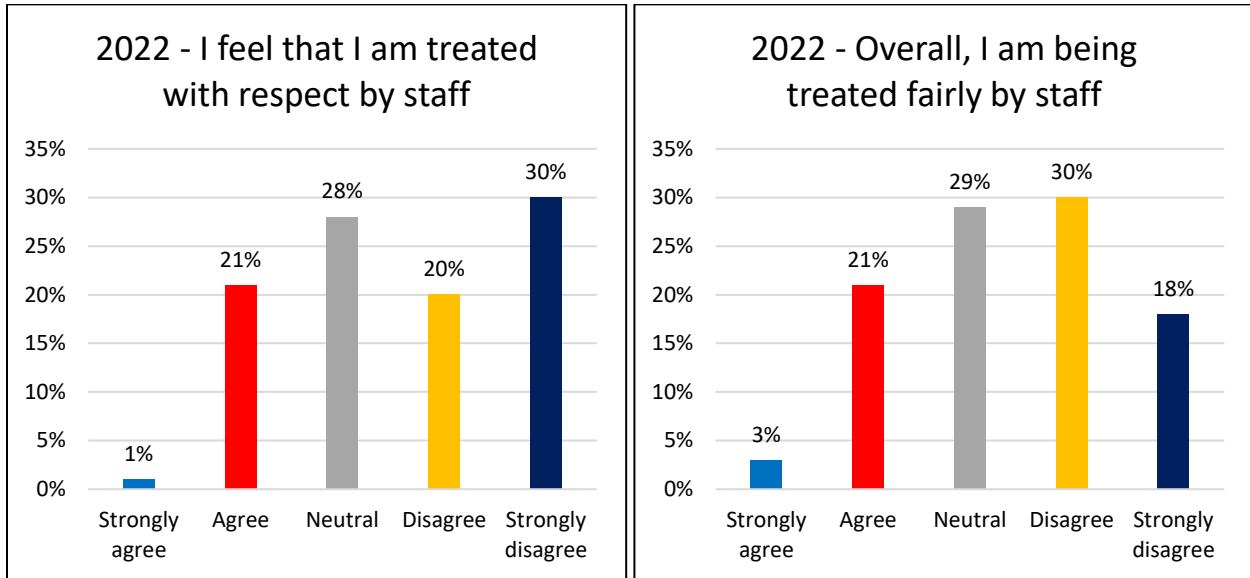
implementing a similar pay structure. IDOC has ramped up its active recruitment strategies at high schools and colleges during 2022. In April 2023, Stateville administrators reported that they had 15 cadets graduate from the academy in the previous class and were expecting another 15 in the next class, larger numbers than they had seen in years. However, staffing levels reportedly remained low through attrition.

In addition to security staff, Stateville reported several staff vacancies for Illinois Correctional Industries (ICI), which has reportedly shifted from focusing on selling its products to providing vocational opportunities. Again, this short staffing has potential to limit positive opportunities for incarcerated people. As JHA detailed in our [2021 Menard monitoring report](#), changes to ICI have also reportedly caused concern to those who had worked in ICI jobs for years but were serving long sentences and were therefore unlikely to be prioritized for vocational programming. Because IDOC prioritizes incarcerated people for programming based on their release date, with more individuals who are close to release transferring to Stateville to prepare for reentry, maximum-security individuals who remain there may have even less access to these desirable work assignments than they have in the past. Stateville administrators reported that ICI assignments were not subject to the six-month rotation schedule that other job assignments are and that those with long sentences continued to be eligible for ICI positions.

Further short staffing for healthcare, including for contractor Wexford positions, continues to present serious barriers for incarcerated people to receive needed services.

Many incarcerated people told JHA during 2022 visits that staff was “*fine*” and that staff did not bother incarcerated people if they did not bother them. Because Stateville is the closest prison to Chicago, it has a more diverse staff than many other prisons within IDOC, and some 2022 MQPL survey respondents expressed that this translated to better treatment. A respondent indicated that one of the most positive things about Stateville was “*Black staff, so there is no racism.*” Someone else said, “*If you live out here in Chicago, that you are around staff who are somewhat similar to you, not just in race, but the same kind of upbringing and more relatable than in a farther [away] prison like down south in Menard, where seeing a Black or Latino staff member is as rare as bumping into your favorite celebrity.*” However, this sentiment was not shared by all. When asked how Stateville could be improved, another respondent said, “*Hire a staff that has a more positive attitude towards Black people.*” 48% of respondents disagreed with the statement, “Overall, I am being treated fairly by staff,” while 24% agreed and 29% were

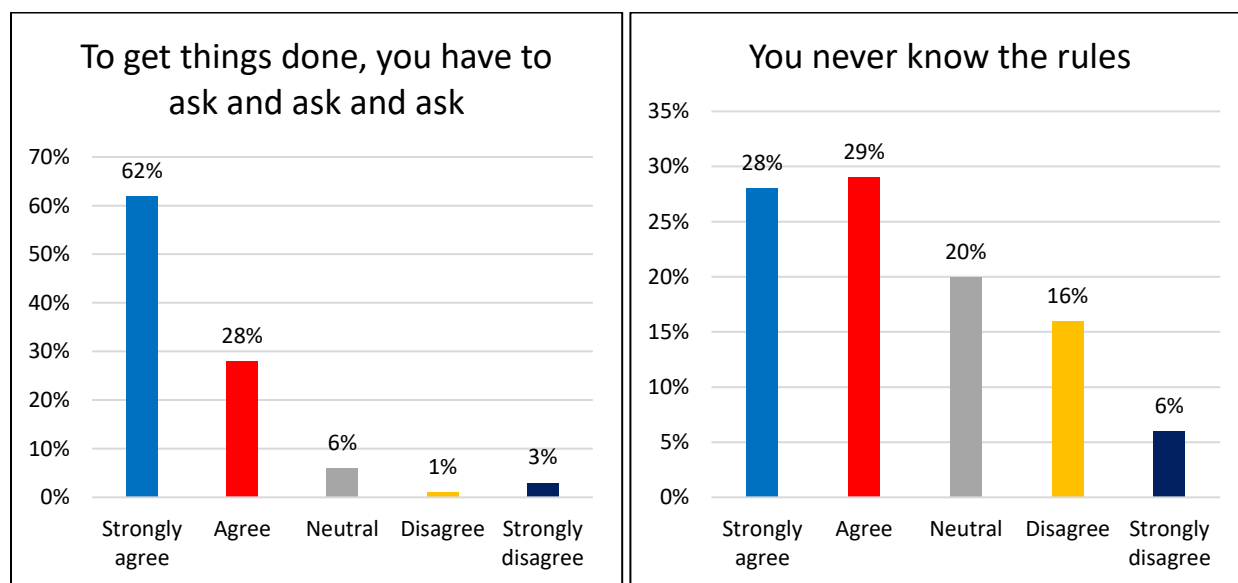
neutral. 50% disagreed with the statement, “I feel that I am treated with respect by staff,” while 22% agreed and 28% were neutral. This shows little change from JHA’s [2018 Stateville survey](#), when 50% reported that most staff treated incarcerated people respectfully, compared to 24% who agreed and 23% who were neutral.



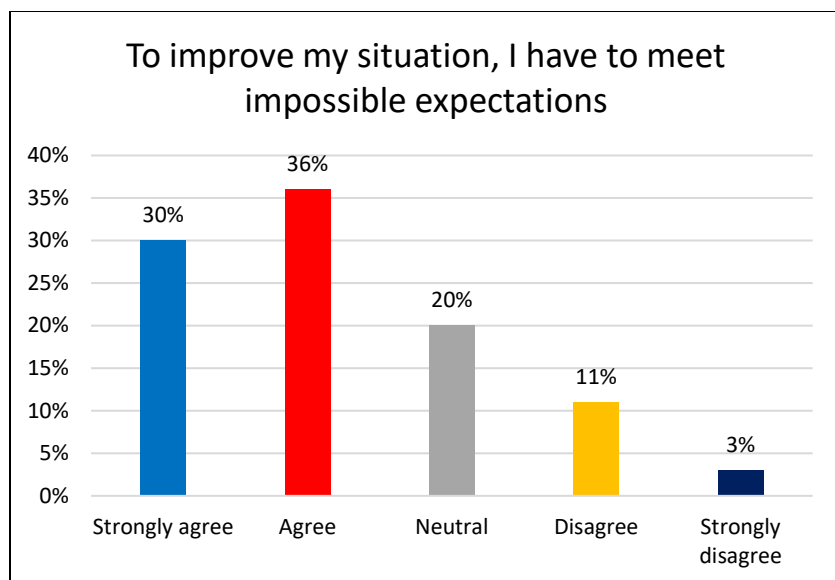
One person stated in their survey that one of the most positive things about Stateville was that *“there are good officers that will help you.”* Another person named the staff as one of the most positive things about the prison, and said that the administration and counselors were *“very*

*responsive.*” However, his suggestion for improvement was to *“get rid of the officers who are not onboard with making the facility better.”* Someone else expressed that *“The mentality of staff has to change from a culture of indifference and punishment.”* Another person shared this sentiment, stating, *“the punitive basis of relationship [between staff and people who are incarcerated] corrupts the possibility of supportive, productive relationships and having a supportive, productive environment.”*

Several incarcerated people expressed concerns that staff were *“lazy”* and only showing up for a paycheck. Someone who responded to JHA’s survey stated that *“the laziness and incompetence from the security staff”* was one of the worst things about Stateville. Another respondent said, *“Most staff members are apathetic and complacent. They just show up to get a check and don’t care that there is mold on the walls or no drinking water.”* A third person stated, *“All the staff know what the problems are but just go along with the things that are wrong because they get paid the same if they do their jobs or not.”* On JHA’s Stateville MQPL survey, 90% of respondents agreed with the statement, *“To get things done, you have to ask and ask and ask.”* People also cited a lack of consistency in how and when rules are enforced as being problematic; one person reported feeling caught in a continuous cycle of changing expectations and orders from staff, providing the example that he *“caught a ticket for disobeying a direct order, because I was in the process of obeying a different direct order.”* 57% respondents agreed with the statement, *“You never know the rules,”* and 66% agreed with the statement, *“To improve my situation, I have to meet impossible expectations.”*







Some incarcerated people described the tension for staff between caring and fraternization or stated that the punitive nature of the relationships between staff and the population prevented staff from being supportive or productive. Some incarcerated people also reported that they had noticed male security staff giving female security staff who were compassionate towards incarcerated people a hard time. Someone suggested that staff training should shift to focus on prosocial engagement between staff and people who are incarcerated and move away from *“interpreting words and actions to fit a violence framework even when no violence has occurred or been indicated.”*

Administrators reported that they were still in the process of increasing staff buy-in for the reentry-focused approach the prison was moving towards in its transition to becoming a multi-level security facility.

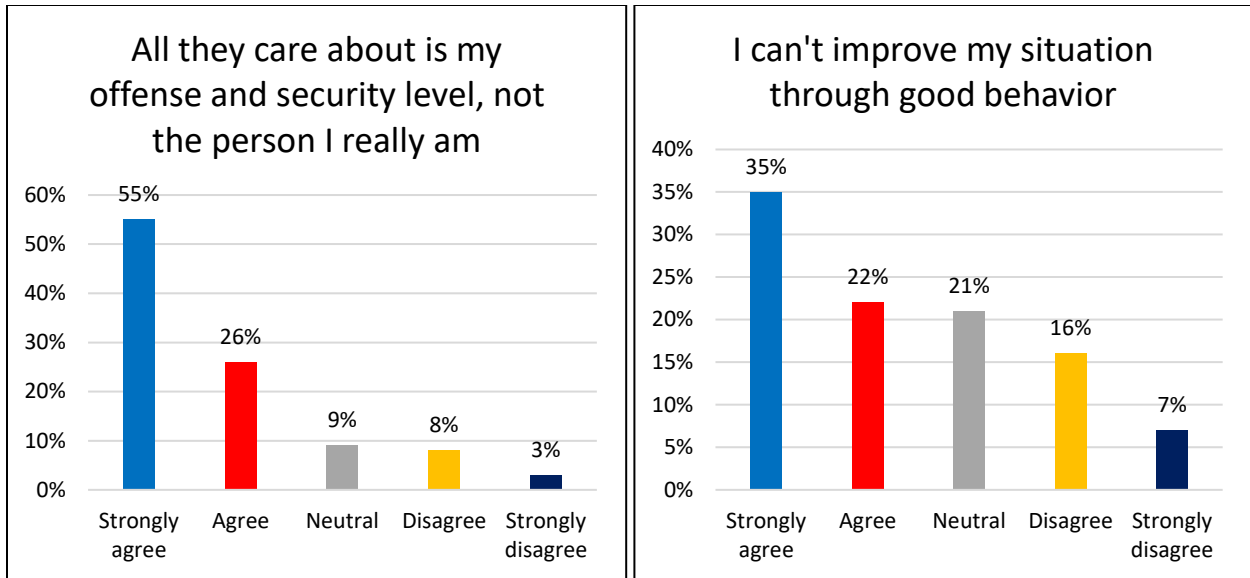
## Population

On the day of the September 2022 visit, Stateville max’s population was 498, which was about half of the population a year prior. The MSU’s population was 118. The [October 2022 Quarterly Report](#) reflects that NRC’s population was 1,126. The MSU and NRC both showed increases in population over the prior year. Administrators reported during the April visit that a large group of people at Stateville max (about 350) had recently been reclassified as medium-security and

transferred to Sheridan, 35 miles west. Administrators told JHA in September that some people previously incarcerated at Stateville—mostly in the MSU—had been transferred to Kewanee Life Skills Reentry Center, a multi-level reentry-focused prison about 100 miles west of Stateville.

JHA applauds the recognition that many people at Stateville did not need to continue to be housed in a maximum-security prison. We continue to believe some individuals in IDOC maximum-security prisons remain “over-classified,” meaning that they are housed in more restrictive statuses than are necessary based on safety and security considerations. Often classifications are still based on initial offense or other factors that are not indicative of ability to be successful in the less secure settings that should provide more rehabilitative opportunities.

On JHA’s Stateville MQPL survey, 81% of respondents agreed with the statement, “All they care about is my offense and security level, not the person I really am.” 57% agreed with the statement, “I can’t improve my situation through good behavior.” **Everyone within IDOC should be provided with opportunity to improve their situation and incentive to do so.** While IDOC seems to be improving regularity of classifications reviews, revisiting some prior determinations still appears difficult, as people are perhaps naturally reluctant to make a wrong call. Incarcerated people, particularly in maxes, have limited occasion to demonstrate rehabilitation due to lack of opportunity for productive activity. There continue to be cases where people are held in more secure environments than necessary and are without needed services, such as substance use disorder treatment. **JHA has been particularly concerned regarding individuals designated as escape risks under severe restrictions in maximum-security settings for conduct that does not appear to be indicative of likelihood to escape from a secure facility, such as resisting arrest or failure to return to a work release program for example (both issues which commonly are tied to untreated substance use disorder and mental health needs).**



At the time of the September JHA visit, one max quarter housing unit had been closed and was reportedly undergoing renovations to prepare for the new focus on reentry. Incarcerated workers were repainting the bars on the cell doors. Another quarter unit had a population of 48, most of whom reportedly had low gallery or low bunk medical permits, and only the ground-level gallery on the unit was populated. Administrators identified this unit as the next slated for renovations that would enable services such as mental health and education to be provided on the unit. The other quarter housing units had populations of 224 and 165. Housing unit X, which housed protective custody, restrictive housing, individuals who had been identified as high risk and some general population workers, had a population of 65. 22 people were living in the healthcare unit.

According to an update provided by Stateville administrators in April 2023, renovations on the closed housing unit had been completed, and they were waiting on water testing before reopening it because of the amount of time it had been unoccupied. Administrators reported that the unit had 137 occupiable cells which would each accommodate one person, and that once opened, it would house those already at Stateville who were participating in the North Park and Northwestern college programs. They then planned to renovate a second unit before beginning to receive transfers from other prisons.

In response to questions regarding who remained in Stateville max's population, administrators reported that incarcerated individuals in education programs would remain there until they

finished. **More than 300 people at the max, representing about 60% of the September 2022 population, could not be moved because they were receiving medical treatment at hospitals near Stateville**, primarily that of the University of Illinois – Chicago (UIC). We were told these people could not be transferred until continuity of care had been established at another prison. Stateville is one of a few prisons in IDOC where people can receive dialysis and there were reportedly 16 people receiving that treatment at the max.

According to administrators, people incarcerated at other prisons were being screened to transfer to Stateville for reentry programming at the time of the September visit. JHA was informed that the specifics of the programming and eligibility criteria to participate had not yet been determined, but that they were reportedly seeking people with a variety of security levels who were close to release. IDOC administrators estimated that individuals transferring in to the prison would probably need to have five years or less left on their sentence to allow those receiving Earned Discretionary Sentence Credits (EDSC) enough time to finish programming while preventing the population from becoming static, but noted that the eligibility requirements had not been finalized.

## Programming

Stateville max benefits from unique programming opportunities due to its proximity to Chicago and has more classes than other maximum-security (or even other security level) prisons in Illinois. During the April visit, JHA was able to speak with the first class in the [music studio](#), where participants work together to produce original pieces. According to participants, they had been selected through an application process. The program reportedly met once a week for eight weeks. The renovated studio area appeared to be in better shape than most of the rest of the facility, and was more reflective of outside or “normalized” space as it was carpeted, had upholstered furniture, and was equipped with what appeared to be new, state-of-the-art electronics, instruments, and recording equipment [donated by the celebrity artist Common](#) in 2021. Program participants played original songs they had recorded and discussed the possibility of their music being played for the public in various forums.

Stateville, like all IDOC prisons, also offers Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Secondary Education (ASE) programs. The ABE program had 72 people enrolled and 55 on the waitlist in

April 2022, and the ASE program had 17 enrolled and six on the waitlist. The prison notably offers opportunities to pursue higher education.

People who participated in the music studio reported enjoying it, with some sharing that it provided them with both emotional and creative outlets to process many of their life experiences, including those which they believed led to their incarceration. One program participant shared that it had been a long time since he had played an instrument, and the program had taught him about beats and chords. He wished the program was not almost over. The people in the program were aware that the intention was for them to continue on as mentors for future classes, but they did not know what that was going to look like yet. By September, there were two classes involved in the music studio. Four participants from the initial class had continued on as mentors. The program continued to be popular and people expressed a desire to spend more time in the studio working on their music as the program was only meeting once per week. Recognizing that other areas, such as yard and dietary, will be higher priority for staffing, **JHA recommends that the hours for programs be expanded to accommodate both additional classes of participants and more time in program spaces for participants.**

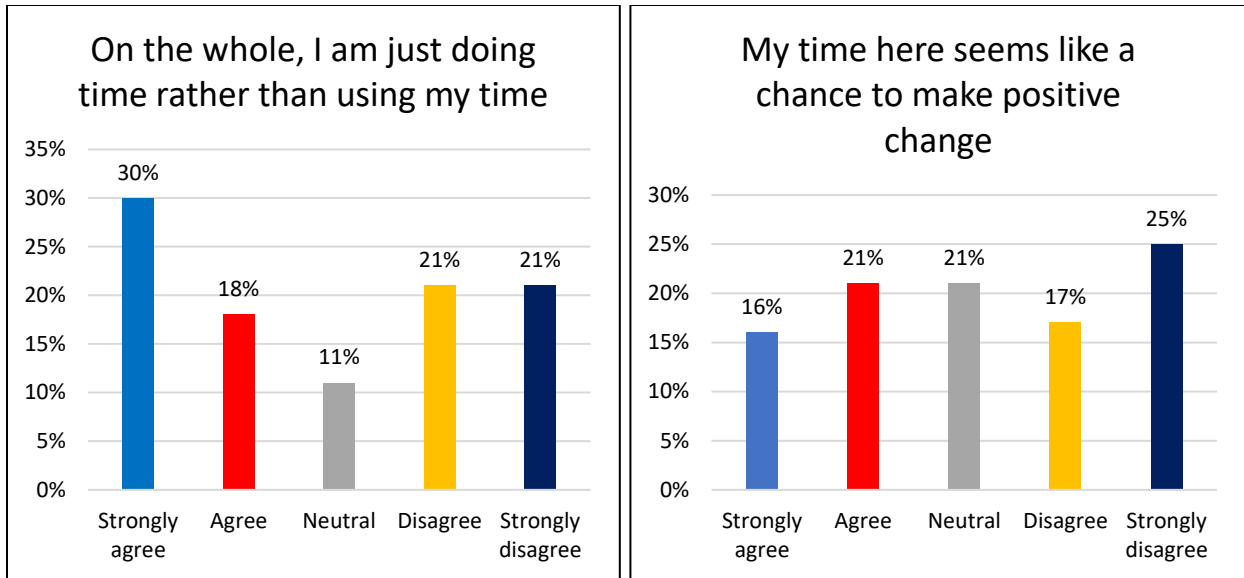
During the 2022 visits, JHA spoke with Stateville’s ambassadors—representatives who act as liaisons between administrators and the population—many of whom had recently finished associates or master’s degrees. All of the ambassadors who had participated in the higher education programs spoke positively about the opportunity. One stated that earning a degree had improved his confidence. Another said that the ability to get an education felt like a second chance. One survey respondent stated that, *“The most positive thing about this prison is the opportunity/privilege to attend the different universities.”* Many others agreed. Another respondent said, *“Now that I have been afforded a chance at a college level education, I am feeling better about my future prospects. But it has taken me all this time to be allowed to do so. I have been in and out of prison since I was 18 and this is my first chance at a college degree.”*

Some people expressed that there were barriers to education, both for those who were enrolled in courses and those who were not. One incarcerated person who had completed a master’s

program reported that he did not have access to encyclopedias and that he would have liked to have been able to type his school work and use email, rather than writing his essays by hand. Another person lamented that, because he was in college classes, he had to choose between going to school and going to yard when those in ABE and ASE did not have to choose. A third person said it was difficult to do school work without a desk in his cell and showed a desk he had created using the top of a property bin that he used while hunched on the top bunk unable to sit up straight, as he was without any other personal space in a small cell shared with a cellmate. Someone expressed that it was unfair that people who were in school in addition to having a job earned less money than people who only had jobs. Students and program providers reported throughout 2022 that opportunities were canceled due to lack of staff for movement.

Many other incarcerated people reported that they did not have an opportunity to participate in the educational programs Stateville offers. Someone who spoke with JHA during the September visit expressed that he had intentionally failed the ABE test so he would be able to go to school, but because he had a life sentence, he had not been put on the waitlist. Someone who responded to JHA's survey and said he had been incarcerated at Stateville for decades commented, *"This time has been spent locked in the cell for the most part and not given anything to prepare me for reentry into society."* On JHA's 2022 survey, 48% of respondents agreed with the statement, "On the whole, I am just doing time rather than using my time," while 42% disagreed. Similarly, 42% disagreed with the statement, "My time here seems like a chance to make positive changes," while 37% agreed.

While JHA was pleased that hear that those who were in educational programs at Stateville seemed to be benefiting from them, **we recommend that IDOC expand access to higher education programs in other prisons so that people do not have to be incarcerated at one of the state's most rundown facilities in order to access those opportunities.**



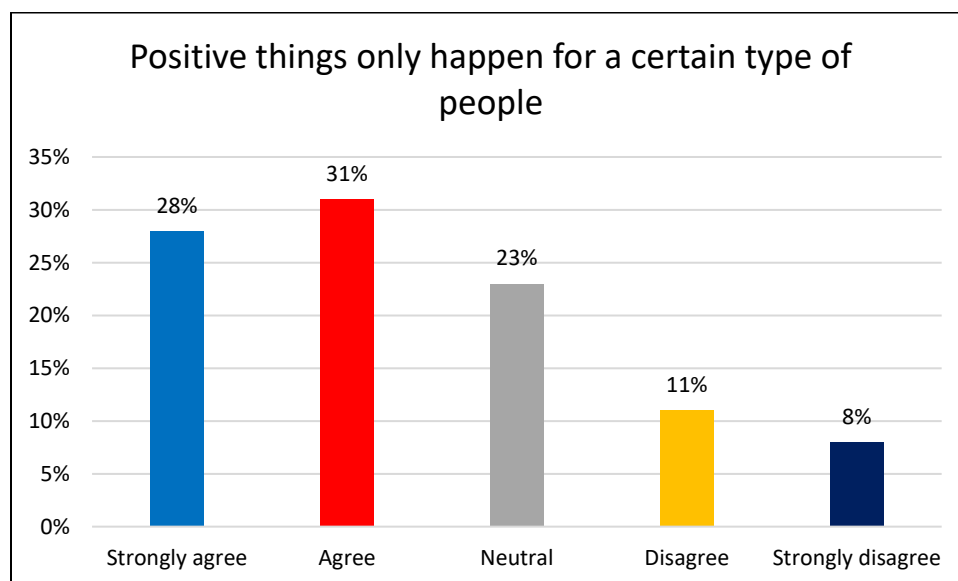
Documents provided by IDOC at the time of the April 2022 visit showed that there were nine people enrolled at the MSU enrolled in ABE, two enrolled in ASE, and 25 on the waitlist for ABE. MSU administrators stated that incarcerated people who did not have a high school diploma or GED were placed in class right away, and that some spots in the class were kept vacant to facilitate this. During the April visit, school staff told JHA that they were waiting on a GED computer, which was being reimaged. During the September visit, an individual who was enrolled in school at the MSU said that he had a *“great teacher”* who was *“never really in a bad mood.”* Administrators identified teachers as a staffing need for the prison in general, as throughout IDOC.

In 2022, administrators at Stateville max reported they offered an ICI recycling program, but as noted in JHA’s [2021 Stateville monitoring report](#), the soap shop and furniture factory had been closed for years. Nine individuals were enrolled in a Barbering program in April 2022 according to documents provided by IDOC, and 13 were on the waitlist. Many survey respondents expressed a desire for additional vocational programs. One person said, *“We need blue collar simulators to learn new trades (CDLs, forklifts, heating and air conditioning, anything that deals with future energy sources, installing solar panels). Not enough real trades offered to those of us who have over 20 years left. Most of us will be released in the future. I want to be future-ready.”* As noted above, IDOC prioritizes individuals for programming by outdate. This means that people with long sentences are repeatedly pushed back on program waitlists as people with short sentences enter the prison and are placed above them. Due to limited enrollments, people

who are serving longer sentences often have little or nothing to do for years, even at the prisons with more programming.

While Stateville offers more options for programming than other maximum-security prisons on IDOC, it does not offer enough programming opportunities to accommodate needs.

Incarcerated people again shared their perception that the same people—referred to by some other people in prison as “unicorns”—got to do all the programming while the rest did not benefit from its availability. This perception appears to reflect reality as JHA continued to encounter the same individuals in various programming and was told by some that only a few had been purposely selected for several opportunities to ensure a smooth launch. Some said that it was people who had gone decades without any disciplinary tickets. An individual who spoke with JHA in September stated that in order to get into a program, you needed to rely on a person who was in the program to tell you how and when to apply. A survey respondent similarly wrote that people could get into education programs “if you happen to know somebody or catch the right person in traffic to sign up into a class or program.” There was also a perception that this was true of other productive, or out-of-cell, opportunities and that the same people got work assignments over and over again before others were able to get a work assignment. Someone told JHA in September that work assignments went to those who could be counted on to pass information to staff. A survey respondent reported that there was “constant favoritism with college classes, jobs, cell moves, etc.” 59% of respondents agreed with the statement, “Positive things only happen for a certain type of people,” on JHA’s 2022 MQPL survey.





**With the stated mission, “To serve justice in Illinois and increase public safety by promoting positive change for those in custody, operating successful reentry programs, and reducing victimization” it is critical that IDOC provide increased programming to everyone in custody.** Moreover, evidence suggests that well-behaved or highly capable people are often those who have the least need for programming, although of course they should continue to be given opportunities for growth. People require opportunities to learn, grow, and acquire new skills. Without adequate educational and vocational programs, the goals of promoting positive change and operating successful reentry programs are thwarted.

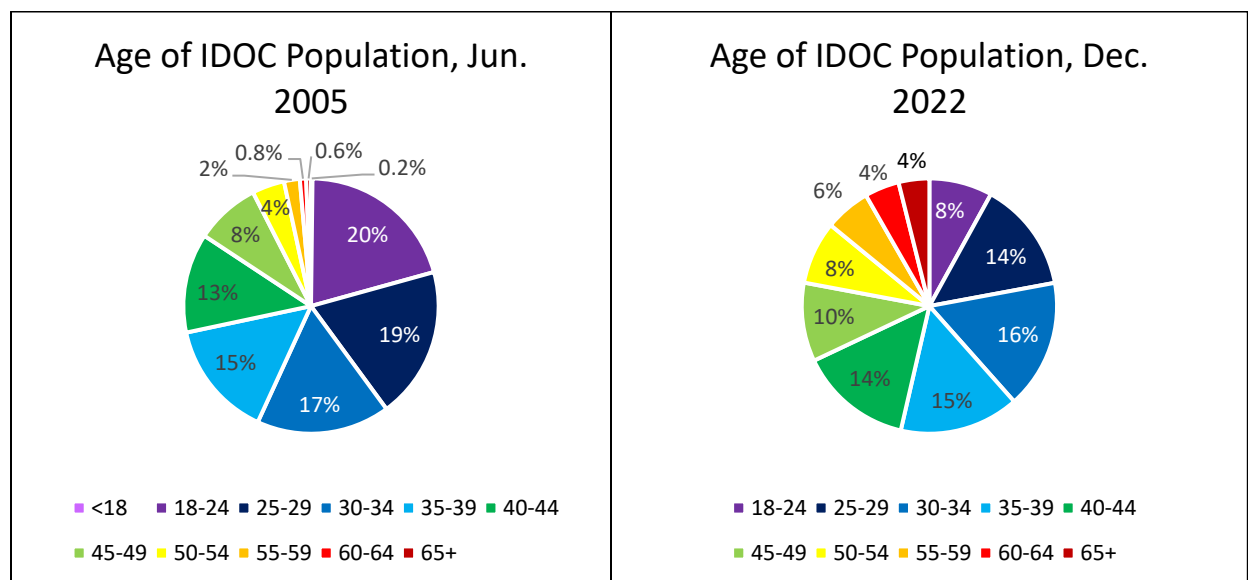
## Healthcare

IDOC has long been unable to provide constitutionally adequate healthcare to the incarcerated people in its care, as is the subject of an ongoing class action lawsuit, [\*Lippert\*](#), which resulted in a consent decree in 2018. Additionally, mental healthcare is being separately litigated in the class action [\*Rasho\*](#), in addition to numerous other health and disability accommodation related class actions and individual lawsuits. During the April 2022 JHA visit, an administrator, stated the prison was preparing to start training incarcerated people as hospice workers after the program had been on hold due to COVID for two years. At that time, administrators did not report they felt they had major staffing shortages in healthcare, but stated that they had some nursing and technician vacancies. The June 2022 *Lippert* court-appointed monitor report detailed extensive healthcare staffing shortages agencywide and with respect to Stateville specifically, noted that sick call rounds had been stopped due to nursing shortages, as of August 2021, and that there were backlogs of patients waiting to be seen by providers even before sick call was stopped. The *Lippert* monitor also noted that Stateville is the only state prison in Illinois allocated for its own dentist and that the position has been vacant for years.

Reportedly, Stateville offered COVID vaccine clinics every two weeks, and 82% of the population at Stateville max was fully vaccinated; however, administrators reported in September that they were waiting on approval to begin administering the most recent booster. JHA continues to hear from incarcerated people in 2023 that they do not have access to updated boosters. During the April 2022 visit, multiple incarcerated people expressed concern that those who tested positive for COVID were no longer being moved off their housing units.

COVID was still affecting operations during the September visit and people commented on the ongoing visitation restrictions, such as Plexiglas barriers still in place for visits despite visitor vaccination requirements at that time, and wondered if staffing issues related to vaccination mandates. Some staff and administrators shared that vaccination mandates had also made getting vendors and volunteers more difficult. In early 2023 the vaccination mandate was suspended.

Incarcerated people also continued to express concerns about their healthcare unrelated to COVID. Stateville’s population, like that of IDOC as a whole, is aging and has substantial medical concerns. [Data](#) from IDOC’s public reporting reflects that the proportion of 18–24-year-olds in IDOC custody has dropped from over 9,000, or 20% of the population, in June 2005 to 2,300, or 8% of the population, in December 2022. Meanwhile, the proportion of those ages 60 and older has increased from 650, 1.5% of the population, in June 2005 to almost 2,500, 8% of the population, in December 2022. Despite IDOC’s total population at the end of 2022 being only 66% of what it was in 2005, there are nearly four times as many people ages 60 and older incarcerated in 2022 than there were in 2005. In fact, the only age brackets with a higher population in IDOC custody in 2022 than in 2005 are those ages 50 and up. **43% of those at Stateville who answered a demographic question about their age in JHA’s 2022 MQPL survey indicated that they were older than 50, while only 5% reported being 30 or younger.**



The aging population corresponds to increased healthcare needs. As noted above, administrators reported in September that about 300 people in the max (or 60% of Stateville max's population) had medical holds, meaning they were receiving continuing care from an outside provider and could not be transferred until a plan for continuity of care was established. The ongoing lack of adequate healthcare staffing and electronic medical records in IDOC presented additional barriers to transfers and proper placement. Also, as noted above, 16 individuals were reportedly on dialysis, which is only available at a few IDOC prisons.

JHA heard other healthcare concerns from individuals in custody, such as lack of antibiotics for a diagnosed infection, a very high blood pressure reading that the person felt was purposefully unrecorded so that treatment did not have to be provided, as well as issues with medication not being provided as prescribed. Concerns about delays in seeing medical staff were also reported, including one individual who said he had signed up for sick call nine times and still had not been seen by a provider.

## Minimum Security Unit

Stateville's Minimum Security Unit (MSU) is located in the same complex as the NRC, outside the walls of Stateville max. It has two buildings where incarcerated people can be housed. At the time of the September 2022 visit, the MSU had a population of 130, a third of its reported maximum capacity. Administrators reported that it housed those with less than five years left on their sentence, although most of the people incarcerated there at the time of JHA's September visit reportedly had outdates within less than a year or two (in 2023 or 2024) which may be further shortened through earning sentencing credit. During the September visit, administrators said that while their population had once been made up largely of people with short sentences, they had shifted focus to reentry for people with relatively longer initial sentences, many of whom had been reclassified to come to the MSU.

Each building had two dormitory-style wings with 48 beds each. At the time of the April visit, one housing area was dedicated to the MSU's permanent population while the other contained those waiting to transfer to other minimum-security prisons. By the September visit, one of the buildings had been closed. Administrators stated that they were unable to reopen it due to low staffing levels. Like the NRC, the MSU was not designed for long-term stays. Unlike other

minimum-security prisons, there is no access to cable or laundry machines on the housing units, and the sleeping areas do not have outlets for radios or other electronics. During the September visit, an individual incarcerated in the MSU stated that laundry was offered twice a week, but since they worked six days a week, they had to handwash their clothes. Some reported their clothes were washed with clothes from NRC, and this was concerning to them. They also could not hang clothes to dry because visual obstructions in housing units pose a security concern. These things, as well as other issues with the physical plant, were common concerns for incarcerated people. As on the max side, people at MSU expressed conditions concerns and spoke of ants, mold in the vents, and broken toilets that took the prison months to fix. People at the MSU (like people in Stateville max) were reliant on bottled and bagged water, and several people there shared the same concerns about the prison's water quality and the changed taste of the bagged water.

JHA also heard about maintenance concerns in the kitchen that serves NRC and MSU. Two people who spoke with JHA in dietary in April said that a liquid they identified as sewage puddled around the oven and fryers. JHA did not observe this, but the floor was being mopped when we arrived. Someone else who spoke with JHA during the same visit said that workers had to climb on two stacked milk crates and stick their fingers into an open electrical box to open the delivery door, and a JHA visitor observed two stacked milk crates under the electrical box as described. This, like other reported and observed conditions, presented serious concerns regarding worker safety. While Stateville has many serious physical plant issues that require attention, **JHA recommends that IDOC ensure maintenance concerns that jeopardize safety are repaired expeditiously.** Staff identified difficulty in contracting with maintenance vendors as a real problem.

According to administrators, everyone at the MSU had a work contract, and those who were in school could have a work contract in addition to a school contract. Some incarcerated people also reported that they had two concurrent work contracts. These contracts allow those who are eligible to earn sentencing credits, resulting in an earlier release date. While some people considered the ease of obtaining a job to be a positive over other prisons, some reported being required to do work that was not part of their assignment or work that was too physically demanding. One person said that staff sometimes woke them up early in the morning to work outside grounds when they were not assigned there, and that they were threatened with tickets if they did not agree to do whatever work was required of them. JHA notes that incarcerated

people require special clearance to work outside grounds. Another said that they were only being paid for five work days but were forced to work six. JHA commonly receives this concern from various prisons. Two people incarcerated at the MSU said that the prison was run “*like a plantation.*” Because IDOC relies on the MSU population as the workforce for Stateville max and NRC, fewer people in the MSU results in more work for each person. Additionally, IDOC staff shortages may be further burdening incarcerated workers. **JHA recommends that IDOC ensure incarcerated people are guaranteed safe working conditions, the right to refuse work not assigned to them without consequences, and compensation for all of their hours worked, without exception.**

There was also a concern among people incarcerated in the MSU that if they sought treatment for medical issues, they would be declared unfit to work and sent to NRC, a much more restrictive environment. A person incarcerated in the MSU in September said that he had been waiting more than two months to see a cardiologist for his arterial fibrillation, but he felt that if he complained about it, he would be sent to NRC. He said that another person from his housing unit, after being told he needed to be put on light duty because of a heart issue, had been on a medical hold for 95 days in NRC which, as JHA has repeatedly reported on, is more isolating than most restrictive housing in IDOC and is unsuitable for long-term stays. A second person said that he was having trouble doing his job, which required going up and down stairs, because he needed a knee replacement. However, he did not want to be sent to NRC while waiting on a transfer. He reported he should never have been transferred to MSU from his prior prison because he should have had a medical hold and could not do physically demanding work. We are disappointed that despite our raising his concerns to administrators, this individual was still housed in NRC after reporting he could not work for medical reasons several months later. Additionally, someone JHA was contacted about in October, who reportedly had been removed from MSU because of inability to work due to health issues, was still be housed in NRC in early January 2023. His loved one reported he lacked access to medication and bedding in NRC in addition to being deprived of the opportunity to earn program sentencing credit while held in isolation there. Given that his outdate was in February, he was unlikely to be moved prior to release.

In response to JHA visit follow-up administrators responded that they were considering light duty work assignments at MSU. **JHA strongly recommends the addition of light work duties at the MSU in consideration of both IDOC’s aging population and requirements for**

**accommodations under the ADA. JHA additionally recommends that IDOC avoid housing those awaiting transfer from the MSU at NRC for long periods of time.**

Several incarcerated people also reported being promised things about the MSU before they were transferred there that did not materialize. Two people in April said they had been told they would be able to get house arrest if they transferred to the MSU and only found out that they could not once they arrived. People reported they were told that they could not earn any EDSC at MSU because programs were unavailable and that they had been active in programming and earning credits at other prisons prior to transfer. This should not occur that people receive negative consequences from what is supposed to be a positive transfer based upon good behavior.

## Northern Reception & Classification Center

As the primary entry point for most people in custody into IDOC, the Northern Reception & Classification Center (NRC) lacks programming, and also presents particularly harsh living conditions with people spending most of their time locked in their cells with less access to commissary and more limitations on contact with outside supports than in other prisons. One individual who wrote to JHA in November 2022 said of NRC, *“[W]hy can’t they run this place like other Receiving/Intake places do, with normal dayrooms/commissary/phones. They treating us like we are in segregation.”* NRC physically is not designed to have dayrooms or other normal prison features. Because of this, incarcerated people should be transferred on to their permanent placement as quickly as possible.

Administrators reported that they aimed to transfer people within 15 to 20 days. However, individuals who are within 30 days of release are held at NRC, and people will also spend longer there if they have a medical hold or are waiting on bedspace at another prison. For example, according to administrators, those designated as maximum-security reportedly stayed at NRC longer—maybe three or four months—because there were fewer beds available for this classification level. According to IDOC’s [publicly reported data](#), as of November 2022, the maximum-security areas at Menard and Illinois River were at 100% of their rated capacity, while the maximum security area at Pontiac was at 97%. Stateville max was at 54%, largely as a

result of the population being moved to other prisons as part of IDOC's reorganization plan detailed earlier in this report. Administrators also reported "ADA" beds, or IDOC housing designated to accommodate people with disabilities, are hard to come by. An individual who wrote to JHA in December 2022 and identified himself as mentally ill stated, *"I been sitting here 40 days as of this day . . . I be confine 24 hours a day here and I still have not been transfer out somewhere else yet and I still have on the same uniform since I got here."* JHA has anecdotally observed individuals in various statuses staying for months in NRC, and has spoken to individuals at other prisons who report stays of more than a month at NRC pre-transfer. **As a threshold matter, JHA recommends more public reporting of length-of-stay data at NRC.**

Notably, anyone coming in on a parole violation—reportedly about a third of NRC's population—often waits to see the parole board. In April, parole hearings had reportedly been happening twice a month and were backlogged. However, administrators said that the following week there were plans to do three days of parole hearings in an attempt to eliminate the backlog. Reportedly, the parole board was looking to bring on additional members so that multiple hearings would be able to run concurrently. In April 2023, Stateville administrators reported that the frequency of parole hearings had increased from four up to sometimes six to eight times per month depending on the number of people at NRC who had come in on a parole violation in a given month.

Another method IDOC has tried in order to minimize those passing through NRC is processing people who are about to be released at country jails. Turnarounds, discussed briefly in JHA's [2021 Stateville report](#), are people who have done all or nearly all of their time in counties jails, who come to NRC to be processed and released back to where they just came from. During the September visit, administrators told JHA that IDOC processes turnarounds at Cook County Jail three days a week. However, JHA's visit took place on one of the off days, and we saw and spoke with several turnarounds in the bullpen. Administrators shared that there was a second position allocated for processing turnarounds, but it was vacant. They also pointed to a lack of efficiency at the jail as a reason they were not able to process as many people there as they wanted to.

NRC has 24 housing units, some of which were closed. Most were double-celled, and each unit holds between 68 and 80 people.

Administrators said that they had increased the number of times which yard was offered from twice a week to six times a week.

However, this reflected the number of days a week that yard was offered generally, not per person.

An individual incarcerated in the NRC could reportedly expect to go to yard just twice a week and would otherwise be primarily locked down.

Notably, NRC shares many of the water infrastructure issues. JHA received letters from two individuals in November 2022 detailing how the toilet in their cell had stopped working three days before, but they had not been moved from the cell. *“[W]e have had no water or toilet for almost 3 days and have had to urinate in the sink and had to hold in our bowel movements since [two and a half days before] and we are still in this cell. Every time we tell a CO about it they just ignore us or say they are working on it.”*

During JHA’s April visit, we walked through the intake process including some changes since our prior visits to include the new risk assessment. Incoming individuals wait in a bullpen area to start the intake process. The first step is a strip search and shower, after which incarcerated people receive their clothes and hygiene items. They then go the records department to have their sentencing orders verified and property, where any property they accumulated at the county jail is catalogued in front of them.

The next step is the Bureau of Information (BOI), where incarcerated people are given a gauntlet of tests, interviews, and assessments to determine their security classification, what kind of programming they need, and whether they need to be sent to an outside hospital to detox. It is also their first opportunity to ask questions of a counselor. A counselor who administered one of the assessments in this area said that they were personally able to interview 46 people in two hours, which would average two-three minutes per person.

After the BOI, incarcerated people go to a medical station where they receive physical and dental x-rays, and have their blood drawn to test for bloodborne pathogens. An administrator said it took two to three weeks for each new person to get a PIN number to use the phones, which was an improvement over what it had been in the past.



# Commissary Update

JHA has been closely monitoring shortages and inconsistencies in IDOC's commissary system [since 2021](#). At the time of the April 2022 visit, IDOC was in the midst of a major systemwide [commissary shortage](#). Administrators reported that they had recently increased the price cap on commissary purchases, which had been reduced during COVID. However, those incarcerated at Stateville reported that the prison still ran out of certain items before they were able to shop. People they had been unable to buy food, hygiene, and clothing. One man said when his family saw him in dirty clothes while visiting, it caused tension because they knew they had sent him money and wanted to know what he was spending it on. **It is vital that IDOC ensure incarcerated people are provided with essential items necessary to maintain hygiene – including clothing – and that, while people should not have to rely on commissary to meet their needs, they should be able to purchase additional food, hygiene products, and clothes, and should be able to purchase enough to last them until their next commissary visit.** In April, administrators acknowledged that ongoing commissary shortages had prompted them to provide bottled water to incarcerated people instead of only offering it in commissary, but noted that bottled water was once again available through commissary.

In September 2022, people incarcerated at Stateville continued to express concerns about their lack of access to commissary. Several said that when the population was higher, they had been able to shop weekly or every other week, but now with a lower population, they were only shopping monthly. Another person stated that commissary had been out of everything for three months and that the week before the visit was the first time they had gotten soap in two months. A third person stated that commissary lacked basic necessities such as hygiene products and underwear. An individual who was assigned to work in commissary reported that the warehouse was “empty”, with only 78 cases of water and 50 packs of cookies left, which presumably would not last long given demand. Administrators again acknowledged that they had had difficulty getting receiving orders they had made for commissary products. Reportedly, they had recently placed three orders and only received one partial order.

Commissary staff at the MSU told JHA that those incarcerated at the MSU had a commissary limit of \$200 a week, which enabled them to mostly forgo meals from dietary. Reportedly, they did not have any particular commissary items that they had not been able to stock at the time of the April visit but sometimes had problems with running out of items before everyone had a

chance to shop. Yet, those incarcerated in the MSU stated that they had been unable to purchase essential items, such as underwear, socks, and toothbrushes.

Additionally, incarcerated people continued to express concern that there was not enough healthy food offered through commissary, which people expressed they need to be able to purchase given the lack of healthy food provided by the prison in dietary. An individual suggested that IDOC offer protein bars and nuts. Another individual who said that he had high blood pressure lamented that items such as fresh vegetables and honey were not made available for purchase. Someone else reported that everything that was healthy was too expensive for most people to afford. Someone at the MSU reported that meat products had been hard to come by. JHA commonly hears concerns regarding high carbohydrates and insufficient protein and vegetables in dietary. **Similar to providing necessary hygiene and clothing items to people in prison, the State of Illinois is responsible for meeting the nutritional needs of the population. Providing healthy options would promote health and well-being as well as serve to recognize the humanity of people in custody.**



This report was written by JHA staff. Media inquiries should be directed to JHA's Executive Director Jennifer Vollen-Katz at (331) 264-4081 or [jvollen@thejha.org](mailto:jvollen@thejha.org)

Incarcerated individuals can send privileged mail to report 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](http://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 agreed to be interviewed for this report and who graciously shared their experiences and insights with us.

