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**Facility Update**



# **Monitoring Visit to Stateville Correctional Center 2024**

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## Introduction

When JHA visited the Stateville maximum-security prison on February 22, 2024, the population was 440, down from 498 at the time of JHA's previous visit in September 2022. Stateville is connected to and shares a staff with the Northern Reception Center (NRC) and Minimum-Security Unit (MSU), neither of which JHA visited in February 2024. This report is an update to [JHA's 2023 Stateville Monitoring Report](#), and comes on the heels of [Governor Pritzker's March 15, 2024 announcement](#) to shutter Stateville and rebuild the facility at the existing location.

JHA provided IDOC with a draft of this report on March 25, and draft review was conducted on May 1. In draft review, IDOC administrators noted that since the Governor's announcement, they had conducted meetings on the topic separately with staff and incarcerated individuals at Stateville, in which they heard people's concerns and reiterated plans to rebuild and improve conditions. Administrators stated that there would continue to be ongoing conversations. On April 26, [IDOC submitted further information](#) on the Stateville closure and rebuild plan to the Illinois Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability, and the public comment period on this recommendation has since opened. JHA will continue to monitor and report on all facilities that house people in state custody in Illinois.

On prior JHA monitoring visits, we were told that Stateville was transitioning to a multi-security level prison with a focus on reentry programming provision for those near release. During those earlier visits, we were told that Stateville had not started receiving transfers who were near release. During the 2024 visit, administrators said that the population had not changed much and that only a very small proportion of the population was releasing within the next five years. Additionally, 300 of the 440 people at Stateville were on medical holds, reportedly preventing them from transferring until continuity of care was established at another prison, despite many of them being classified as medium- or minimum-security. The same number was reported to JHA in 2022.

## Key Takeaways

- There were a large number of people on medical holds at Stateville who could otherwise transfer to a prison with a lower security level, and this number appeared unchanged from more than a year prior.

- Despite ongoing maintenance work at Stateville, the state of the prison’s physical plant remained unacceptable, with unpotable discolored water and bird-inhabited cell houses being of particular concern to the population.
- Many people reported that yard was frequently cancelled and that they were often fed in their cell, limiting out-of-cell time to just a few hours a week, especially for those without school or work assignments.
- JHA was pleased to hear about some positive changes that were expected when Unit E reopened for housing students (planned shortly after our visit), such as offering dayroom and planned increased use of single-celling at Stateville.
- While many appreciated the ability to attend school, students expressed that scheduling conflicts with classes deprived them of other opportunities, including seeking healthcare or outdoor exercise, and that movement issues caused them to miss out on class time.

## Recommendations

In light of the Governor’s announcement of plans to close Stateville max and rebuild, JHA recommends:

1. Use of every available mechanism– including application of sentence credit, clemency, and medical release – by the Governor and IDOC to reduce the population at Stateville and within IDOC significantly.
2. Transparency around the process of moving people out of the facility to begin construction. While there will undoubtedly be security concerns related to exact timing of transfers, allowing people to pack and bring their property as well as to notify loved ones of imminent changes to location will make the situation less fraught and reduce administrative challenges subsequent to moving facilities.
3. Inclusion of all stakeholders in the process of planning a new facility on the current grounds of Stateville. Understanding the needs and perspectives of people who have lived and worked inside this and other prisons is critical to ensuring that whatever comes next is safe, humane, and designed to provide the treatment and programming people need to become productive citizens.
4. Reduction of the IDOC footprint by permanently closing prisons that are not needed, expensive to run, dangerous, and inhumane, and which contribute to excess capacity in the system.

## Physical Plant



Opened in March 1925, Stateville is one of IDOC's oldest operational prisons and has long experienced numerous, persistent physical plant concerns with the [highest deferred maintenance estimated costs](#). During JHA's 2024 visit, incarcerated people once again reported that the water coming out of the faucets was discolored yellow or brown. One person showed visitors such bottles of water he had collected from the sink in his cell. Administrators said that the water in the prison was safe to drink per IEPA standards, but that each individual received a case of 24 16.9-ounce bottles of water every week. When asked, multiple individuals shared that they would never feel comfortable drinking the prison's water. Others expressed that they did not feel comfortable using it to bathe. Several incarcerated people reported that they did not receive enough bottled water to last them a week and that it was not always passed out consistently. Additional bottled water was reportedly available for purchase on commissary, but some incarcerated people said they had not been able to buy any. Administrators acknowledged supply issues, stemming in part from the state-issued bottled water and commissary bottled water coming from the same vendor, which sometimes caused them to pass out water off schedule, but stated that they were always able to catch up.

Those incarcerated at Stateville also had concerns about birds in the cellhouses and chow hall. One person showed visitors sheets that he and his cellmate had hung up around their bunkbeds to keep birds away from them. Another person said that when the fan in the cellhouse turned on, the airflow blew bird feathers and feces into the air. Administrators said that they had been waiting for the prison's tradespeople to complete OSHA training before performing work high off the ground (which is necessary to reach parts of the cellhouses for cleaning), but now that they had finished, there were plans to repair the screens on the windows into the cellhouses. Additionally, Stateville was reportedly receiving new kitchen equipment, some of which had been difficult to obtain because the prison is steam-fed.

At the time of the visit, the only parts of the prison that were inhabited were Units C, D, and X. Unit E (where college students usually lived) had undergone structural work, and administrators said they were awaiting the results of some water testing that was required before the unit reopened. Administrators reported that when Unit E reopened, 97% of the population would be single-celled. In May 2024 draft review, Stateville administrators confirmed that Unit E had reopened on February 28 and had a population of 122. Reportedly, dayroom had been offered on Unit E starting a week after it reopened and increased single-celling had been realized as expected.

## Movement

Incarcerated people expressed that out-of-cell time for those who were unassigned—meaning that they did not have school or work assignments—was limited and inconsistent. In May 2024 draft review, Stateville administrators reported that 174 of the 432 people incarcerated at Stateville (40%) were unassigned. They stated that they had increased assignments since JHA's visit and continued to seek to increase them. Administrators also noted that the unassigned number included people who were medically unable to work. As of May, Stateville reportedly offered 38 types of work assignments including some—such as wheelchair pushers—that were recently created. Administrators stated that they follow the IDOC Administrative Directive to rotate workers every six months, so that those who are unassigned should have future opportunity.

Many people reported that yard was often cancelled, as on the date of our visit, and some reported **typically only going to yard once or twice a week for two and a half hours at a**

**time.** Students said that they often had to choose between going to class and going to yard, and suggested that they should be allowed to go to “detail yard,” which takes place on Saturdays and is for those with jobs who have to work during regular yard opportunities. An individual who attended ADA yard said that because of when it was scheduled, he had to choose between yard and church services. Others reported ADA issues that deterred from going to yard, such as needing to cross uneven surfaces to access the yard, lack of restroom access while on yard, and wheelchairs not having leg supports. In May 2024 draft review, administrators acknowledged that staffing shortages sometimes required them to cancel yard but reported that they had started running evening yard—offered at some prisons in the summer—and looked for other ways to increase yard time on days when they had enough staff. They noted that they had not been on lockdown recently and that with staffing issues they prioritized running visits and programming, but that yard time had been a struggle. [Available public reporting](#) reflected no lockdown days at Stateville in February, when the JHA visit occurred and people reported little out-of-cell time, or in March of 2024. In addition to inconsistent yard time, during the visit some individuals in custody also said that chow lines were often cancelled and they were fed in their cells instead, reducing the frequency of another opportunity for out-of-cell time.

At the time of the visit, Stateville was using the emergency response unit—a team of six security staff on hand for emergency situations such as cell extractions—to facilitate movement when the prison was short on other security staff. While these staff were not outfitted the same way they would be when responding to an emergency, incarcerated people had noticed their increased presence on housing units and reported feeling uneasy. **JHA recommended that the emergency response team be uniformed more like other security staff when running regular movement, and that this use be reiterated to the population to decrease incarcerated people’s feelings of discomfort.**

## Programming

According to IDOC’s [January 2024 Quarterly Report](#), 78 people at Stateville were engaged in Adult Basic Education (ABE) or Adult Secondary Education (ASE) in November 2023. From September to November 2022, there were between 70 and 83 people enrolled in ABE and ASE at Stateville, so this educational enrollment had not increased from the prior year. Additionally, the educational numbers from this report include both students at the MSU and the max. In May 2024 draft review, administrators noted that since the visit they had increased MSU educational

participation such that all individuals in the MSU who were eligible for ABE and ASE were enrolled and there was no MSU educational waitlist.

The only vocational program onsite was the Barber College, a certificate-yielding program which reportedly had 12 participants at the time of the visit and a maximum capacity of 15. Stateville also housed an Illinois Correctional Industries (ICI) Recycling program. Administrators said they wanted to offer more vocational opportunities and had the space for them, but had not been given approval.

College classes were offered at Stateville through [Northwestern University](#), [North Park University](#), [DePaul University](#), [Prison + Neighborhood Arts/Education Project](#), and [University Without Walls](#) (UWW) in partnership with Northern Illinois University, [for which participation numbers are not yet publicly reported](#). Reportedly, the Northwestern, North Park, and UWW programs were degree-granting, and the DePaul program yielded a certificate. According to educational staff, there were 65 people in the Northwestern program, 25 in the North Park program, 30 in the PNAP program, 9 in the UWW program, and 30 in the DePaul program—numbers which duplicated people who were participating in multiple programs. Administrators estimated that about 110 individuals, about 25% of the population, were participating in educational programming at Stateville max.

JHA spoke with both ASE/GED and college students during the visit. Those studying for the GED expressed a need for updated textbooks and a wider variety of materials. An individual who was preparing to take the GED test a second time said that he was unsure how to better prepare himself when he only had access to the same book he had studied with before taking the test the first time. Students also said that the program would benefit from having additional tutors.

When an incarcerated person works a job in addition to going to school, their educational assignment is considered their primary assignment, meaning it is the one they get paid for. However, school pays less than some jobs available within the prison. Students told JHA visitors that this disincentivized school participation, especially for those who could not rely on their families for financial support, because people could make more money working the same job if they were not in school. Administrators stated that educational tutors or peer mentors

could achieve higher pay, but that pay for those in school was locked at a single rate and as the primary assignment per IDOC policy.

At the time of the visit, college students had been moved to the X Unit during the renovations to Unit E, where they were normally housed. Someone who was in one of the college programs said that staff often took them to class late and arrived early to pick them up, and that sometimes the professors spent so long waiting to get into the prison that they were still not there when the students arrived, making the class effectively an hour or more shorter than it was supposed to be. Students in both ASE and college programs also reported that their healthcare passes were often scheduled during their class time, and that when they missed class for a healthcare pass, they were marked absent, which could result in being removed from the class if it happened too many times.

JHA visitors walked through Unit E, which was anticipated to reopen shortly after the visit, and saw upholstered furniture and area rugs in the area where staff said dayroom would take place. Administrators said that when the unit was operational, dayroom would occur four hours a night, five days a week, and each of the five galleries had dayroom one night a week. Reportedly, there were plans to gradually introduce dayroom on the other housing units once the idea of running dayroom in a maximum-security prison had been normalized for staff.

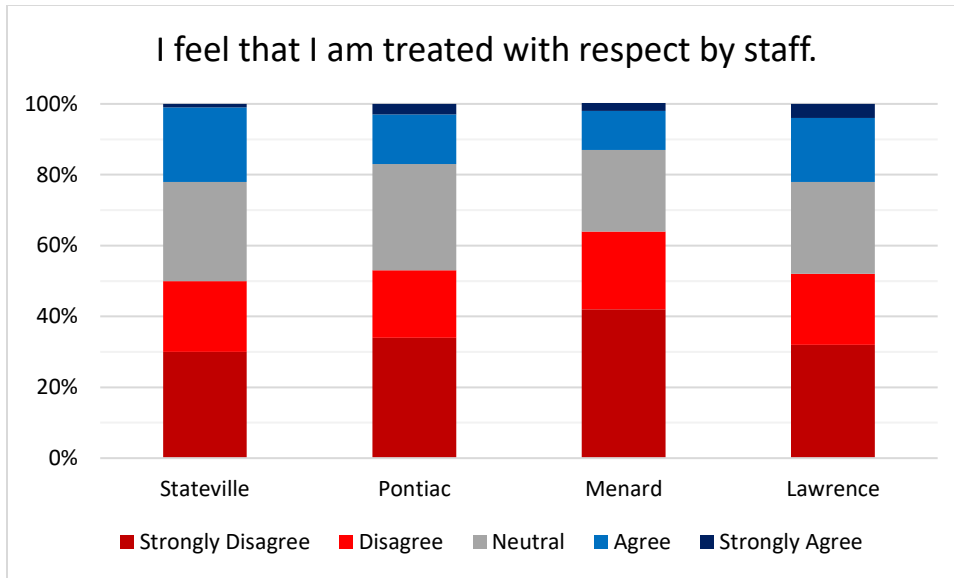
## Staffing

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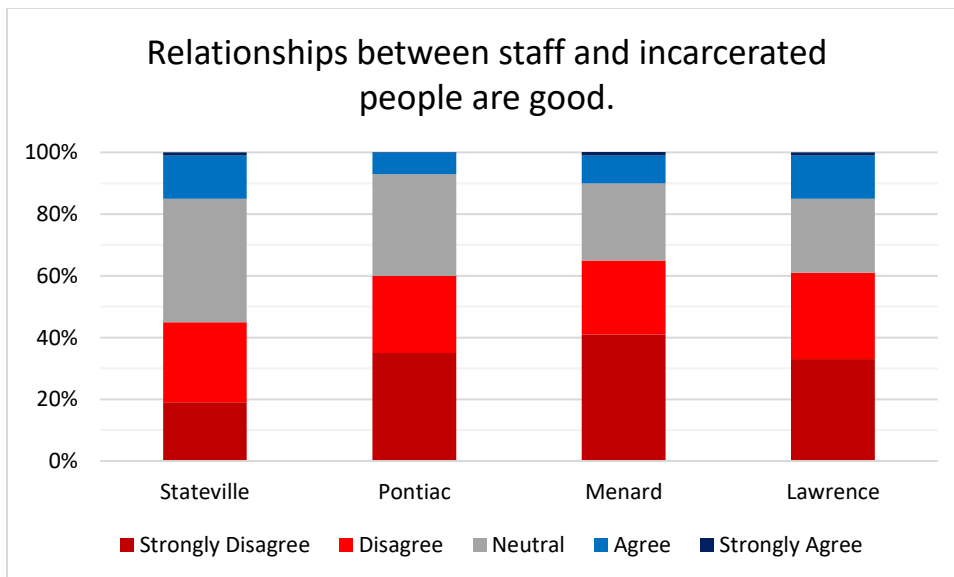
Stateville had a reported incarcerated person-to-security staff ratio of 2.6:1 in [November 2023](#), well below IDOC's average of 3.7:1. Other IDOC men's maximum-security prisons (Pontiac and Menard) and Lawrence (which was becoming a maximum-security prison) had reported ratios of 1.6:1, 3.3:1, and 2.3:1 respectively.

In [JHA's 2022-2023 MQPL survey](#), there are some indicators that relations with staff at Stateville may have been perceived more positively than at other maximum-security prisons.



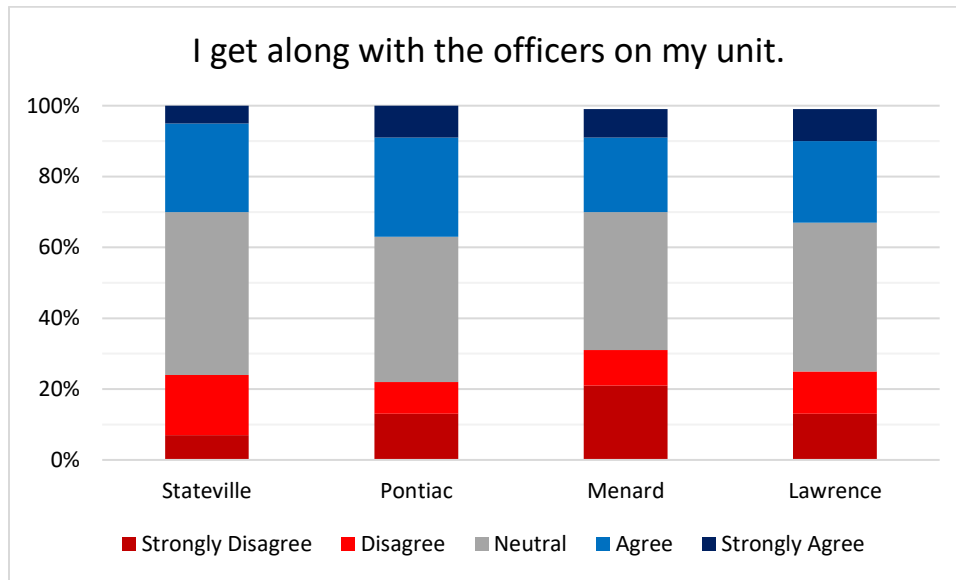


Respondents from Stateville were more likely to agree or be neutral in response to the statement, “*Relationships between staff and incarcerated people are good,*” compared to respondents from IDOC’s other men’s maximum-security prisons. 45% of respondents from Stateville disagreed, compared to 60-65% of respondents from comparison prisons.



However, the percent of respondents at Stateville who agreed or were neutral in response to the statement that “*I get along with the officers on my unit*” was much closer to the responses from

the other male maximum-security prisons. 24% of respondents from Stateville disagreed, compared to 22% from Pontiac, 31% from Menard, and 25% from Lawrence.



Some people who spoke with JHA on the 2024 Stateville visit expressed concerns about staff, such as that staff lacked accountability. Someone said that he had had issues with staff taking his healthcare passes and then telling him he could not go to healthcare because he no longer had a pass. However, someone who had transferred from Menard said that the atmosphere at Stateville was significantly better, which he attributed to both the low population and the diversity of the staff at Stateville.

In addition to issues relating to lack of staff to facilitate movement, staff reported to JHA that the educational programs were understaffed but that there were enough educators to meet the needs of the population at the time of the visit because many people were in college or vocational programs that were run by volunteers or contractors. Some people shared concerns regarding healthcare staffing, such as an incarcerated person who said that mental health staff was low and this limited the ability of those incarcerated at Stateville to access mental health care. Another person commented on the frequent healthcare staff turnover as a barrier to care.

## Conclusion

Given the changes anticipated in the next three to five years whereby the current facility structure will be shuttered and rebuilt in the same location, and people currently incarcerated at Stateville max will be relocated to other prisons, there is much uncertainty of the future of this prison. However, change comes slowly to Illinois, even more so to the prison system, and it is important that we continue to shed light on the current realities of life inside our prisons. JHA reports also provide a record that can be used to measure change, determine priorities, and document issues so that they can be avoided rather than repeated. While the footprint of the Illinois prison system has excess capacity when compared to the population and so does not need to operate all of the existing, expensive – and in many cases unsafe and inhumane – facilities, removing people from Stateville in the near term is an important step in protecting their human rights and well-being.



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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](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.

