

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Dauphin County Prison made great strides on its journey of continuous improvement in 2022 – overhauling policies and protocols, adding key administrative leadership positions, building a well-trained and well-engaged workforce, and investing in numerous resource enhancements for incarcerated individuals.

The following are highlights from the 2022 Year-End Report:

Operational Improvements

Former Pennsylvania Secretary of Corrections John Wetzel was engaged to conduct a top-to-bottom review of prison operations. The result has been a range of policy and procedural improvements, as well as the hiring of key leadership personnel. New leadership appointments include a chief deputy warden, a deputy warden of operations and a treatment deputy warden. The focus on treatment is of particular note, as the prison continues to focus increased resources on behavioral health and substance use disorder treatment.

Policy upgrades have helped to standardize staff procedures and protocols, improve operational efficiencies and create a safer and more secure environment for incarcerated individuals, visitors and staff. A highlight of this work was the overhaul and implementation of the prison’s handbook for incarcerated individuals, which provides standardized information and sets behavioral expectations for all incarcerated persons upon entry into the facility.

Staff Recruitment and Retention

An ongoing challenge for the prison has been, and continues to be, staff recruitment. Beyond the normal cycle of staff turnover (retirements, resignations, terminations, etc.), the entire criminal justice field suffers from a lack of qualified and interested candidates in a range of positions – from correctional officers to treatment specialists and administrative support staff. As a result, Dauphin County Prison routinely has dozens of vacant positions. Prison leadership is committed to addressing this issue, attending recruitment events and job fairs and visiting colleges and universities. A renewed emphasis on recruitment is planned for 2023.

As prison leaders continue their work to fill vacant positions, there is also a focus on retaining existing staff. Prison work can be both extremely rewarding and extremely challenging. Staffing shortages can add stress and contribute to burnout. While EAP resources and ongoing training can help to address some of those concerns, the reality in the current market is that the prison needed to do more to reward and retain qualified staff. That’s why a new staff retention bonus and attendance incentive was put into place. Other improvements include a recently remodeled staff dining area and break room. It is expected that these and other initiatives will help improve staff engagement and retention.

Health and Safety Enhancements

The health and safety of incarcerated individuals, visitors and staff is our highest priority. From standardized policies and training programs to additional mental health treatment resources to investments in facility and technology upgrades – all of these initiatives help to make Dauphin County Prison safer and our population healthier.

The best way to improve health and safety is to focus on prevention strategies. That is why the prison has boosted staff and resources in mental health and substance use disorder treatment. Roughly half of incarcerated individuals at the prison suffer from mental illness, and substance use disorder remains an ongoing health and safety risk. The implementation of mobile tablet devices for incarcerated individuals to communicate with loved ones and receive mail is one example of how prevention can make a difference. In addition to providing a convenient and low-cost method for communicating with loved ones via email, the devices also made it possible for the prison to transition mail services to an off-site location that scans all mail and allows incarcerated individuals the ability to receive their mail via their tablet device. This change has eliminated one area of the prison where illegal and banned substances were sometimes able to be distributed to incarcerated individuals.

Despite increased mental health treatment and improved safety and security measures, serious incidents can and do occur. For this reason, the prison has implemented enhanced security policies and new training for staff. This includes a new and improved Use of Force Policy, a revised Inmate Transport Policy and a new Critical Incident Stress management Policy – all intended to prevent harm and ensure safety through de-escalation and best-practice incident response procedures.

Recidivism and Reentry

Dauphin County Prison leadership recognizes that its chief objective is to successfully treat and rehabilitate incarcerated individuals so that they can exit the criminal justice system as productive members of society and not to return to the criminal justice system. Despite its name, the prison is truly intended to be a correctional facility – where the life trajectory of incarcerated individuals can be corrected for the betterment of the Dauphin County community.

With this goal in mind, the prison has increased efforts to reduce the rate of recidivism among incarcerated individuals through community reentry programs. The prison has added a behavioral health reentry coordinator and a mental health reentry coordinator to assist individuals with their health needs as they prepare to exit incarceration. These efforts also require the help and partnership of community organizations and other county agencies. The prison works with a variety of community partners to provide assistance to individuals who leave the prison and require employment and educational training, legal services, housing, health care and a range of additional needs.

The transition from incarceration to community can be challenging for some individuals. That is why the prison implemented reentry presentations for incarcerated individuals, offering resources and information from eight partner agencies. That program has been expanded in 2023 to include the prison's first-ever Reentry Resource Fair program. The first fair occurred Jan. 10 and included 10 local agencies. Nearly 60 incarcerated individuals attended the first event. Additional events are planned to be held quarterly.

Continuing the Improvement Journey in 2023

The Dauphin County Prison has made significant improvements in nearly every aspect of its operations in 2022, but the journey continues in 2023.

The year began with the hiring of a new executive leader to oversee all prison operations. Criminal Justice Director John Bey has identified the following key priorities for the coming year:

1. Accountability
2. Staff Recruitment, Retention and Training
3. Community Engagement
4. Recidivism and Reentry
5. Facility Improvements

While these are the top priorities for 2023, they are not the only priorities. Prison leadership will continue its focus on a wide range of operational and capital improvements, with an overall goal of making Dauphin County Prison a best-practice model in Pennsylvania.