



NEWS RELEASE
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Correction employees picket for safe prisons at DR&C Central Office

Columbus – Chanting “safe prisons now” and “no more cuts,” Correction employees represented by the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association and who work in the state prisons held a picket today in front of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Central Office in Columbus to demand safer prisons.

Correction Officers and prison maintenance and clerical staff were joined on the picket line by medical personnel, parole officers as well as prison teachers. The group says cuts in security staff, deficiencies with a food service vendor and other poor choices by DR&C have caused breaches in security and left prison staff fearful for their safety and that of their communities.

“We know budgets are about choices and the choices DR&C has made and continues to make despite our warnings, have put our security at risk and made our prisons more violent and dangerous places to work,” said OCSEA President Christopher Mabe. “We need more security staff, an end to the food service contract and an opportunity to be real partners with DR&C in keeping our prisons safe.”

Union leaders point to the shedding of 400 Correction Officer positions, the elimination of posts at prison perimeters, numerous problems with the prison food service vendor as some of the missteps and poor choices the agency has made in recent years. To make matters worse, sentencing reform did not lower the number of inmates incarcerated and still hovers at around 50,600 inmates, in a system built for 38,579.

“Unfortunately, DR&C and the Governor’s office are in denial that a problem even exists,” said Mabe. “They’ve turned their backs on Ohioans by ignoring the problems of security and making multiple security breaches out to be no big deal,” said Mabe. “But it is a big deal when you find multiple maggot infestations or when 100 Aramark employees are walked out of the prisons in less than a year’s time. It is a big deal when you cut posts and continue to run low security staffing levels and yet have a record number of inmates. And it’s a big deal when a murderer is housed in a minimum security prison and escapes,” said Mabe. “I don’t understand why they are ignoring the obvious signs.”

For the last three years, DR&C has had budget increases that far outpaced the cut the agency received in 2011. Yet instead of investing in Correction Officer positions, the department funded additional managerial staff positions and gave wardens raises, among other choices, according to the union.

“Taxpayers want to know where their money’s going?” said OCSEA Corrections Assembly President Jim Adkins. “Well, here’s where it’s going: Instead of investing in front line security staff, they’ve given wardens an average 20 percent raise, added unit managers and lieutenants and created an entire new structure of “regional managers” we’ve never had before.”

Besides creating a top-heavy staff structure, the union says special projects in inmate programming and things like drone testing show DR&C has gotten away from its core mission of providing safe prisons. “Now they’re testing drones and spent \$50,000 to hire a contractor to tell them why someone escaped from a prison. But we can’t hire enough Correction Officers?” said Adkins. “Come on.”

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OCSEA represents approximately 30,000 state employees who work in a wide range of security, regulatory, administrative, direct care, maintenance, customer service and other positions, including 8,500 who work in the Ohio Department of Correction and Rehabilitation. For more information, contact Sally Meckling, 614-865-2602 or 614-404-3881 (cell).