



NEWS RELEASE

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Report confirms union's view over lack of security at Allen prison

Westerville – The union representing the majority of state Correctional employees is applauding the response by the Ohio Dept. of Rehabilitation and Correction after a high-profile inmate escaped at the Oakwood Allen Correctional Institution. Among other operational changes, the agency has moved the Warden and Deputy Warden to other positions within the agency. According to a report issued today, the agency has also moved high-level security inmates to other prisons and acknowledged a lack of leadership in the area where Chardon shooter T.J. Lane and others escaped. The report also indicates the department is looking into why management failed to properly investigate incident reports filed by Correction Officers that security was being breached and a possible escape was being planned.

While the investigation into three escapes at the prison has not yet concluded, the union believes DR&C may be beginning to listen to leaders of the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association who have repeatedly warned of security risks at the Lima prison. Correction Officers at the Allen prison gave managers advance information that an escape was in the works. Additionally, the union warned that some inmates in high security levels were not appropriately placed at the minimum-security prison and were causing harm to some staff.

“In this case we feel the agency has begun to listen to our concerns and made the right call by taking responsibility at the top first,” said OCSEA President Christopher Mabe. “We want to make sure that Correction Officers won’t be scapegoated as this investigation winds down. But so far, it appears the department rightly understands the buck stops at the top,” he said.

“We are also in discussions about adding posts to the protective custody area and know that high level security inmates are in the process of moving,” said Mabe. “Is there more DR&C can do? Absolutely. We still need more staff in the Lima prison and throughout the system. We also need an end to the food service contract, which is pulling security staff from needed areas into prison dining halls across the state. Additionally, DR&C needs to listen to frontline staff who are on the ground and have direct information when problems arise,” he added.

“If the union hadn’t spoken out, we don’t think we would have had this outcome,” said Russ Bewsey, the chapter union leader at the Allen prison. “In the future, DR&C needs to address these security issues head on and not wait for a high-profile inmate to escape. They need to be proactive, not reactive, and the administration needs to listen to the front line staff when issues arise,” he said.

“We are ready and willing to partner with DR&C to come up with realistic solutions to violence, understaffing and overcrowding. Our door is always open,” said Mabe.

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).