



NEWS RELEASE

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March 27, 2014

Injured Correction Officers call for 400 more COs to curb high “major assault” rate

Correction Officers (COs) who have suffered major physical assaults, today said their injuries are a direct result of not enough security staff in Ohio prisons. The COs, who are members of the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association, are calling for an additional 400 officers to curb the violence.

While there’s been a decrease in the overall assault rate on staff and minor injury rate, a closer examination shows that major physical assaults that leave COs with career-ending injuries and a lifetime of emotional and physical scars have hit a 7-year high. In fact, the major assault rate sharply increased in 2011 and has not gone down since.

Correction Officers endure hundreds of “minor” injuries every year from assaults by inmates such as lacerations, punctures, and blunt-force impacts, which can be treated at the institution, allowing the COs to return to duty. But major attacks are often brutal and can have lasting impacts. These require staff to seek medical attention outside the prison and the employee to be off work for weeks or months. Sometimes, the staff never returns to work.

Correction Officer **Monica Meade** from Trumbull Correctional Institution suffered an incident last year that left her battered and off work for months. An inmate threatened to throw her over a second floor prison range balcony. While she was able to fight off her attacker and prevent the fall, she was struck by multiple blows to her face. “People need to understand that there is a cost, both in lost time, and in the emotional and psychological trauma,” said Mead. “I’m a single mom with three children to raise. I need this job. I can’t afford to be off work or injured and I can’t afford the trauma of something like this.”

Correction Officer **Jeffrey Cavendish** from Noble Correctional Institution had a similar story to tell about his assault. In the “chow hall” an inmate punched CO Cavendish multiple times in the face after the officer asked him to leave due to inappropriate contact with a food service worker. The officer was on leave for more than eight weeks due to his injuries.

At the same time the major assault rate escalated, more than 846 CO positions have been cut from the state ranks since 2007, even though the inmate population has not measurably declined. In just the last three years, 568 CO positions have been lost to budget cuts.

But the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction has said only 83 COs will be hired as a result of the mid-biennium budget review process, and only at three prisons: Mansfield, Toledo and Chillicothe. OCSEA leaders say more are needed and that without an increase,

COs will continue to be injured, causing an increase in Workers' Compensation, overtime and other "lost time" costs, some of which cannot be measured.

"That's why we're speaking out about the need for more 'boots on the ground; and more 'feet on the beat,' said OCSEA President **Christopher Mabe**, a former Correction Sergeant at Lorain Correctional Institution. "Without an increase in staff, our members will continue to get injured regardless of sentencing reform, regardless of a facilities' security level, regardless of the recidivism rate and regardless of the amount of inmate programming. This issue must be addressed and now. We are at a boiling point."

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).