

Sunday August 7, 2022

A SHORT STAFFED PRISON IN SD

It is amazing how quickly the South Dakota State Penitentiary has become under-staffed after the Governor fired high ranking prison officials such as the Chief Warden, Deputy Warden and others, while the Secretary of Corrections was suspended, then allowed to retire. The Governor of South Dakota did this last year and the number of prison employees has gone down alot since then, with employees quitting, being fired, or retiring. The Governor is trying to promote a positive change in the South Dakota Department of Corrections that has been so badly needed for such a long time.

The Governor has hired two people from outside the state to fill the roles of the vacant Chief Warden and Secretary of Corrections positions. One person from Minnesota for Chief warden and a lady from Colorado for Secretary of Corrections.

The changes will take time to fix some of the problems with this prison and address the staffing shortages which has resulted in recreation being canceled on weekends, no outside recreation on nice days and even Prison Industries, where I presently work being shutdown for a day or not being able to work the days we normally do because the prison needs the two officers to work somewhere else. One officer told me he doesn't want to be "On this sinking ship." so is quitting whenever he finds another job. The prison staff are getting burnt out on the required overtime and the lower wages compared to the surrounding states. The bad thing about so many prison staff quitting, is that prison staff are being promoted quickly to senior positions who don't have the experience or the ethics that are needed for those positions and the prison doesn't want to hold these newly appointed prison staff accountable for the unethical conduct they practice for fear more officers will quit. That is another problem that is being allowed to continue from the last regime whom were fired by the governor. There needs to be accountability and fixes here.

One thing I believe would help fix the prison shortages is to raise the pay of the prison staff to be closer to the surrounding states in the midwest. South Dakota has had \$millions\$ in state surplus of funds every year and I think it would be wise to use this surplus to fund pay raises for prison staff and also pay for things to be fixed at the state Penitentiary, like upgrading alot of equipment, getting healthier food to save on medical costs, and educational programs and job training for when prisoners are released.

This prison system needs alot of changes and there is always resistance to change, but I am glad with replacements of senior prison officials and more of the calls for prison reform here being sounded, that there is hope for the positive changes that are so urgently needed. I hope the staff shortages at the South Dakota State Penitentiary are a wake up call to everyone of the urgently needed reforms and issues that need to be addressed now, not later.

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