



Office of the Ombuds for Corrections

2025 Annual Report

Promoting the Highest Standards of Justice

Contents

Executive Summary	<u>3</u>
Message from the Ombudsperson	<u>4</u>
Office Overview	<u>5</u>
Complaints, Investigations, and Resolutions	<u>6</u>
Outcomes	<u>10</u>
Strengthening Policies and Practices	<u>16</u>
Conclusion	<u>19</u>
Appendix A: Complaint Subjects by Facility Type	<u>20</u>
Appendix B: How to Submit a Complaint	<u>23</u>

Cover photo: Entrance to Minnesota Correctional Facility-St. Cloud, one of 11 state prisons and 150 local correctional facilities over which the Office of the Ombuds for Corrections has jurisdiction.

Executive Summary

The Office of the Ombuds for Corrections is an independent oversight agency focused on individual concerns and systemic issues that affect the health, safety, well-being, and rights of incarcerated people and staff.

Mission

To promote the highest attainable standards of competence, efficiency, and justice in the administration of corrections.

Jurisdiction

Any facility in Minnesota operated or licensed by the Department of Corrections (DOC).

Complaint jurisdiction for local facilities is shared with DOC Inspection & Enforcement.

Budget

\$1,118,000 in FY26 and
\$1,137,000 in FY27

Staff

7 FTE with broad experience in relevant fields



Find reports, how to submit a complaint, and more on the office website: <https://mn.gov/obfc/>.

Complaints and Investigations in 2025

Top areas of concern include medical care, mental health and substance use treatment, visiting, and discipline.

- 968 complaints
- 159 investigations

Response Times

Prompt responses and early resolution of concerns help prevent problems from escalating and promote timely improvement of conditions.

- **Calls and emails:** Same or next business day
- **Mailed complaints:** 3-5 business days
- **Individual investigations:** 45 days, most often within 2 weeks
- **Systemic investigations:** Typically within 6 months

Public Reports in 2025

The Ombuds for Corrections issues public reports for selected issues to promote transparency and understanding with the public and build trust in independent oversight.

Public reports released in 2025 shed light on:

- Crumbling conditions in Minnesota prisons
- The urgent need for mental health support in Minnesota's jails
- Search of religious head coverings during visiting



Message from the Ombudsperson

The Office of the Ombuds for Corrections marked its fifth year of service in 2025. Since the newly recreated office's Ombudsperson was appointed in January 2020, the office has evolved from concept to a fully functioning agency focused on individual and systemic issues experienced by adults and youth in Minnesota's prisons, jails, and detention centers. Over this period, we have received 3,145 complaints, along with more than 3,000 messages from incarcerated people about COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021. Each complaint or concern represents a person seeking information, fairness, or better conditions. We received 968 complaints in 2025.

During our first five years, we issued public reports on concerns which led to significant systemic change, including:

- investments in body-worn cameras and better protections against sexual assaults,
- the experiences of families supporting incarcerated loved ones and investments in a family support unit,
- strengthening grievance policies to ensure incarcerated people have a reliable way to raise concerns, leading to the launch of a public dashboard with summary grievance data,
- crumbling conditions in prisons, contributing to the Legislature's decision to begin a phased closure of Minnesota Correctional Facility (MCF)-Stillwater, and
- costs of phone and video communication in jails.

These reports reflect our commitment to promoting the highest standards of justice in Minnesota's corrections system.

In 2025, our office published public reports about the need for additional mental health support in Minnesota jails, religious rights, and the crumbling conditions in Minnesota's prisons. The announcement of the phased closure of Minnesota Correctional Facility–Stillwater was a significant event for the corrections system. The phased closure and the new and expanded programs now housed at the facility demonstrate how Minnesota can approach incarceration in ways that promote *both* safety and rehabilitation.

As we look ahead, the office remains focused on strengthening our capacity and advancing recommendations that support a fairer, safer, and more accountable corrections system. The next year will build on the foundation of our first five, and we are committed to continuing this work with integrity and independence.

Margaret Zadra
Ombudsperson for Corrections

Office Overview

The Office of the Ombuds for Corrections is a neutral and impartial investigator of complaints regarding Minnesota corrections agency actions and policies. The office is separate and independent from the Department of Corrections.

Mission and Jurisdiction



The mission of the Office of the Ombuds for Corrections is to promote the highest attainable standards of competence, efficiency, and justice in the administration of corrections.

The Office has jurisdiction over any facility in Minnesota operated or licensed by the Department of Corrections (DOC). This includes 11 prisons and 150 local adult and juvenile facilities, with a typical daily population of over 17,000 persons and nearly 210,000 intakes and releases a year.^{1,2}

What We Do



- Review complaints from incarcerated people, concerned family, corrections staff, and community members about Minnesota correctional facilities.
- Initiate, investigate, and resolve individual complaints and systemic issues.
- Make recommendations to agency leadership, the Legislature, and Governor.
- Publish public reports of findings, recommendations, and DOC responses.
- Provide information about policies and processes.

Budget



Seven full-time staff receive, investigate, and resolve complaints and complete the work of the office. The office has a budget of \$1,118,000 in FY26 and \$1,137,000 in FY27 from the General Fund. During a challenging budget cycle for our state, the office continued to prioritize the most complex and serious cases, while also preparing for more robust work in the future.

Given the important work and benefits of the office, the cost is minimal for a significant resource. For comparison, the Ombuds for Corrections budget is less than one-tenth of one percent of the Public Safety and Judiciary budget.³ The Public Safety and Judiciary budget is about five percent of the overall General Fund.

1. Minnesota Profile. Prison Policy Initiative. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/MN.html>.
 2. Wang, Leah. "Since You Asked: How Many Women and Men Are Released from Each State's Prisons and Jails Every Year?" Prison Policy Initiative. February 28, 2024. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2024/02/28/releases-sex-state/>.
 3. 2026-2027 Enacted Biennial Budget." Minnesota Management and Budget. <https://mn.gov/mmb/budget/current-budget/current-enacted-budget/>.



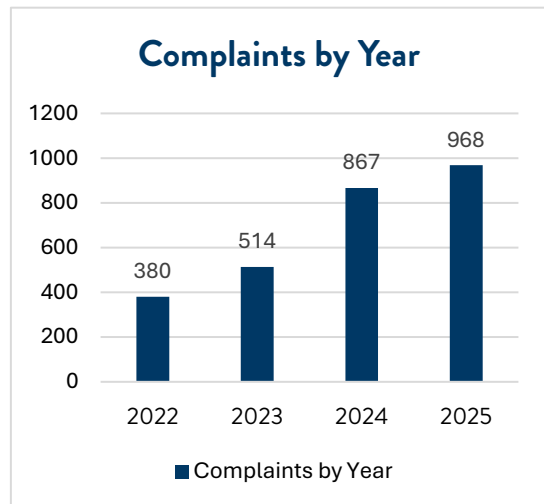
Complaints, Investigations, and Resolutions

The primary focus of the Ombuds for Corrections is receiving, investigating, and resolving concerns from incarcerated people, their loved ones, staff, and members of the community.

Photo: Cell block at Minnesota Correctional Facility-Rush City, one of 11 state prisons and 150 local correctional facilities over which the Office of the Ombuds for Corrections has jurisdiction.

Complaints in 2025

The Ombuds for Corrections refers to concerns shared with the office as complaints, whether they are received by phone, electronically, mail, or in person. The office received 968 complaints in 2025, an increase from 2024 and a significant increase over prior years.



Common Complaint Subjects

- Medical care
- Mental health and substance use treatment
- Discipline
- Accessibility
- Visiting

While some areas continue to trend, evidence suggests that complaints decrease in areas where the office provides intensive, systemic support.

Response Times

The office emphasizes prompt responses and early resolution of concerns to prevent problems from escalating and promotes timely improvement of conditions. With a small staff and limited resources, the office uses effective, efficient processes to ensure high-quality service to complainants.

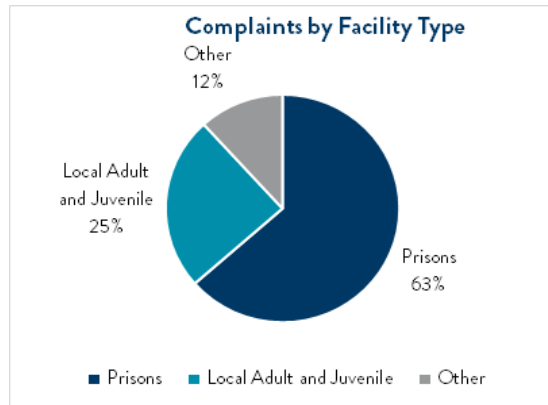
Calls and Emails	Mailed Complaints	Individual Investigations Investigations V I D U A L	Systemic Investigations
Same or next business day	3-5 business days	45 days, most often within 2 weeks	Typically within 6 months

Complaint Jurisdiction

The Ombuds for Corrections has jurisdiction over Minnesota Correctional Facilities, known as state prisons, and shares complaint jurisdiction with the Department of Corrections Inspection and Enforcement Unit (I&E) for local facilities, which includes all DOC-licensed facilities including jails, juvenile detention, and halfway houses.

Local Facility Jurisdiction

[Minnesota Statutes, 241.91](#) give the Ombuds for Corrections jurisdiction to investigate local adult and juvenile correctional facilities. However, the statute requires that similar services provided by I&E not be duplicated for adult facilities. The Ombuds for Corrections and the DOC have entered into an interagency agreement, as required by statute, granting the DOC primary jurisdiction for local facility compliance complaints. The Ombuds for Corrections may investigate systemic and discretionary policy issues and make recommendations for changes.



Cases by Facility

- **615 complaints** in 2025 were from or regarding Minnesota Correctional Facilities (prisons).
- **239 of complaints** in 2025 were regarding adult and juvenile local facilities (jails, halfway houses, etc.).

The remaining 114 complaints were regarding federal facilities, public defenders, probation or parole officers, and other entities not under Ombuds for Corrections jurisdiction. Information and resources about where to file those complaints is provided to complainants whenever possible.

Facility Visits

Ombuds staff make regular visits to state prisons and local correctional facilities to observe conditions and hear about challenges and successes. In addition to regular visits, investigators conduct office hours at all state prisons to increase access for incarcerated people to share their concerns. In 2025, the office began a greater focus on juvenile correctional facilities, including regular visits to local and state correctional facilities for juveniles and worked collaboratively with partner agencies and organizations to better meet the needs of children in justice settings.

How Complaints and Concerns Are Resolved

Complaints and concerns are resolved based on the issues raised and what is needed to address them effectively.

Resolutions may include:

- referrals to the appropriate agency or process,
- providing information about resources,
- alerting staff to concerns or affirming agency actions,
- providing resolution through mediated processes, or through
- more in-depth investigations and recommendations.

Sharing Information and Resources

People often contact the Ombuds for Corrections when they have been unsuccessful resolving their issues elsewhere or when seeking help with processes that are often confusing and intimidating. The daily work of our office involves sharing information, explaining processes, connecting people to resources, and talking with family and friends who have concerns about incarcerated loved ones or with staff who have concerns about the system in which they work.



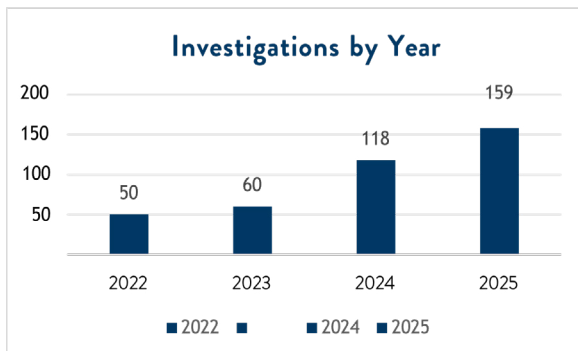
Reassurance Provided

Loved ones of multiple incarcerated people contacted the office because they heard a facility was in lockdown and that incarcerated people had no water. They worried about their incarcerated family members.

Ombuds staff contacted the facility and learned that a water main line unexpectedly broke during a construction project, and that incarcerated people were offered water during the four-hour period before water was restored. Ombuds staff provided updates to family members to ease their concerns.

Investigations in 2025

In more than 80% of cases from 2025, the Ombuds for Corrections was able to conclude investigations through early resolution, meaning that staff can resolve a person's issue or answer their question within a week, and often sooner. Despite the frequency of early resolutions, in-depth investigations have increased significantly.



The Ombuds for Corrections conducted 159 investigations in 2025, an increase over 2024 and more than double prior years.

The Ombuds for Corrections faces more investigations related to:

- The rights of incarcerated persons
- Systemic issues
- Staff well-being
- Unexpected deaths and near-deaths

Investigations are resolved informally when possible. Informal recommendations can often be implemented more quickly and collaboratively than formal, published recommendations, which have statutory requirements regarding publication and the opportunity for the agency being criticized to respond. The office balances the transparency of our work with the vulnerability of the populations we serve, while protecting private, confidential, and security data.

Systemic Investigations

The trends observed through individual complaints and investigations often reveal patterns that warrant deeper review. Investigations into systemic issues are more labor-intensive and can take longer to resolve than individual complaints. As a result, these investigations may not provide immediate resolution for individuals, but they can create system-wide change by strengthening practices and policies that reduce the risk of harm.

In 2025, the Ombuds for Corrections received or initiated 136 systemic complaints.

By addressing both individual and systemic issues, the Ombuds for Corrections promotes higher standards of competence, efficiency, and justice in Minnesota's corrections system.



Outcomes

The Ombuds for Corrections prioritizes complaints and investigations that involve health, safety, well-being, and issues that affect the rights of marginalized or vulnerable groups because they are central to a fair and accountable corrections system.

The following example outcomes demonstrate how complaints and investigations can lead to individual and broader changes in Minnesota's prisons and jails. These examples are not comprehensive but provide highlights of the types of cases our office works to resolve; see the appendix for a list of topics by facility type for a fuller picture of the topics of complaints received by the office.

Photo: An upper floor tier of cells at Minnesota Correctional Facility-Stillwater. The Legislature decided to close the facility in phases by June 30, 2029, due to crumbling infrastructure, unsustainable costs, and safety concerns.

Health

Health care access improves quality of life and helps people participate in programs, education, and employment that support successful community reentry. Incarcerated people share concerns about medical and mental health care that involve delays, gaps, or misunderstandings. These concerns may reveal broader challenges in providing timely, adequate, and coordinated care across facilities.

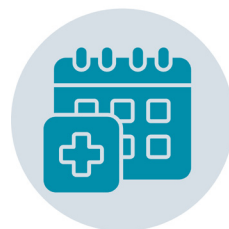
Medical Care

Pain Medication Reordered



An incarcerated person requested a meeting with an Ombuds staff because their pain medication for a permanent injury was discontinued, and multiple alternatives did not provide pain relief. An Ombuds investigator reviewed all documentation, met with the incarcerated person, and met with staff. The investigator reviewed the incarcerated person's medical history, alternative medications, and medical recommendations. After a secondary review by the medical leadership team, the DOC reordered the medication. The incarcerated person is now better able to move independently and participate in programming.

Appointment Requests Improved



An incarcerated person submitted a complaint that they waited a week to be seen by a nurse, resulting in their hospitalization. While the person survived, the outcome could have been different, so they wanted to alert our office to the issue. An Ombuds investigator found that the delay was an oversight, in part due to staffing shortages. DOC and facility medical leadership responded by creating a plan to ensure that incarcerated people can receive timely medical care.

While this incarcerated person's outcome was not changed, the outcome better protects the health and safety of others.

Mental Health Care

Reassurance Provided



A person being held at a county jail awaiting placement at a mental health treatment facility reached out to the Ombuds for Corrections. The person feared for their safety and had been unable to resolve their complaint through other means due to their mental health acuity and continued to decompensate. An Ombuds investigator met with the individual in jail and reviewed the incarcerated person's concerns and the living space. The Ombuds investigator shared information with jail staff about next steps.

The incarcerated person asked for a letter from Ombuds staff stating that the person acted appropriately in reporting the perceived threat to their safety to jail staff. Although jail staff were not concerned about the reporting, the person wanted an additional layer of clarity and appreciated the conversation with Ombuds staff and the follow-up letter from them. The incarcerated person had no further incidents in jail and later transferred to a mental health treatment facility.

Support for People Decompensating in Prison



The Ombuds for Corrections occasionally hears from staff at state correctional facilities who are concerned about incarcerated people with mental health needs that may not be addressed with currently available treatment. For example, an incarcerated person's mental illness may be too acute to live safely in the general population, but their condition is not acute enough to stay in the mental health unit at MCF-Oak Park Heights, forcing them to be housed in administrative segregation.

In other cases, intensive mental health treatment may not be available. While men in the prison or jail system in Minnesota can be moved to the mental health unit at MCF-Oak Park Heights to receive more intensive mental health supports, there is no such unit within the corrections system for women. In the past, incarcerated women may have been placed at the Forensic Mental Health Program operated by the state Direct Care and Treatment in St. Peter. However, this rarely happens now. State-operated mental health treatment facilities have long wait lists and lower staff-to-patient ratios than correctional facilities, which cannot decline to take someone. See our 2025 report, [Languishing Behind Bars](#), for more information about the wait for state-operated mental health treatment facilities.

The Ombuds for Corrections has worked to find creative solutions for individual cases and continues to explore systemic improvements to address unmet mental health needs in state prisons.

Multi-Agency Collaboration for Better Mental Health Care

One of the most common concerns that the Ombuds for Corrections responds to at local jails is regarding people whose mental health is decompensating. While the Ombuds for Corrections cannot provide legal or medical advice, jail staff, social workers, and family members contact the office when someone is languishing while waiting for placement at a mental health treatment facility.

In one case, the Ombuds for Corrections collaborated with case workers, jail staff, and state health care agencies to find better care for a person in jail with a mental health condition so severe that they could not safely be in community. Typically, a person in this situation would be hospitalized for stabilization, but local hospitals would not hold them despite being required to by the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act (EMTALA). The Ombuds for Corrections office additionally met with other ombuds offices to find resources. Because the individual continued to be picked up by local law enforcement with additional charges, the jail needed to provide ongoing care for them while waiting for a bed at a mental health treatment facility. Their needs were so severe that it was helpful to have another set of eyes checking in with the person, the facility, and the case workers during this time.

This is one of many examples that led to the first of what will likely be several systemic reports on mental health in jails.



Public Report

July 2025: [Languishing Behind Bars: The Urgent Need for Mental Health Support in Minnesota Jails](#)

This report details the increasing number of people with severe mental illness languishing in Minnesota's jails and the devastating impact this has on incarcerated people, corrections staff, and families. The report calls on Minnesota to prioritize resources to increase access to mental health care within jails, in mental health treatment facilities, and across the system. It also highlights current initiatives to improve access to mental health care for people in jail.

These outcomes show how resolving health concerns can strengthen processes and promote change across systems.

Safety

Safer prisons and jails lead to improved quality of life and fewer unexpected and preventable deaths, near-fatal incidents, and serious physical or mental harm from dangerous conditions. In 2025, Ombuds investigators reviewed incidents and made informal recommendations for better processes including use of force, use of restraints, and use of canines. Below are additional examples of Ombuds for Corrections' work to improve safety for individuals and across the corrections system.



Needs Met After Incident

An incarcerated person met with an investigator after they were involved in an incident in which clothing and other items were taken as evidence. As a result, the incarcerated person didn't have shower shoes or their glasses. Facility leadership agreed to replace these items. The incarcerated person was able to resume their regular daily activities.



Deaths and Near Fatalities

Despite the passing of the [Hardell Sherrell Act](#) in 2021, near-fatal incidents and unexpected and preventable deaths continue to rise. They are often linked to high needs of the population served by corrections or systemic issues in facilities. The Ombuds for Corrections reviews fatalities and near-fatal incidents and continues to focus on the issues that contribute to these incidents in facilities. However, there is a significant need for a more robust, collaborative safety process in the future.

Crumbling Conditions Create Crisis in Minnesota Prisons

Under-resourced prisons are not serving
Minnesota's public safety needs.

This report highlights the need for Minnesota to update prison
infrastructure and modernize facilities to protect the health and
well-being of incarcerated people.

Public Report

February 2025: [Crumbling Conditions Create Crisis in Minnesota Prisons](#)

This report emphasized ongoing and worsening structural issues in Minnesota prisons and how they reduce safety for corrections staff and incarcerated people. Recommendations include:

- Create infrastructure updates, including expanding capacity at other Minnesota prisons, allowing for the eventual closure of MCF-Stillwater.
- Prioritize a therapeutic facility for the growing number of incarcerated people affected by aging, chronic illness, mental health needs, substance use disorders, and disabilities.

In May 2025, the Minnesota Legislature approved the phased closure of MCF-Stillwater by mid-2029.

By addressing conditions that can lead to harm, the Ombuds for Corrections helps reduce preventable harm and supports safer, more accountable environments.

Well-Being

Resolutions regarding well-being show how day-to-day conditions shape stability and fairness in correctional facilities.



Restitution Reversed

An incarcerated person met with an Ombuds investigator because money was being taken from their account to pay restitution as discipline for a decades-old incident. The incident was an accidental window break from a snowball, which occurred while they were a minor during a previous incarceration. Nearly two decades after the incident, the process for charging restitution had also changed. After a lengthy, comprehensive review, the Ombuds investigator made an informal recommendation that the DOC vacate the balance and refund the money the incarcerated person had paid. The DOC agreed to vacate the balance, but not to refund money already paid. After the Ombudsperson for Corrections made a formal recommendation, the DOC further agreed to issue a refund.



Employment Contracts for Incarcerated People Updated

An incarcerated person met with an Ombuds investigator to discuss concerns that parts of employment contracts for incarcerated people regarding grievances, workplace performance, and the discipline process in their work area were not consistent with DOC policy. The Ombuds investigator found that the contracts had, over time, been inconsistently updated between units at the facility and some of the employment contracts for incarcerated people were not consistent with updated facility rules or DOC policy. Facility leadership responded immediately and had all contracts that needed updates rewritten.



Implementation of Recommendations

In addition to shining a light on issues, public reports highlight progress on recommendations for improvement. Following are changes implemented after the DOC accepted recommendations by the Ombuds for Corrections in prior years.

Strengthening Family Supports

In 2025 the DOC Family Supports Unit released a revised guidebook for families and began hosting virtual meetings to explain general processes, so they could hear from facility staff and Family Supports Unit staff and ask questions. The Ombuds for Corrections recommended regularly reviewing and updating information and continuing and expanding meetings for friends and family after a successful pilot. See the Ombuds for Corrections' 2021 [Strengthening Families](#) report and the 2023 [Family and Friends of Incarcerated Pilot](#) report.

Resolutions in this area demonstrate how improving practices for daily life inside facilities can enhance stability, fairness, and quality of life throughout a facility.

Rights of Vulnerable or Marginalized Groups

Incarcerated people's rights include freedom from discrimination, freedom of religious exercise, and reasonable accommodation for disabilities. Complaints in these areas may reveal opportunities to better ensure that policies or practices are protecting the rights of people who already face heightened barriers.



Pager Process Corrected

An incarcerated person uses a medical pager because of a hearing impairment. They submitted a complaint to our office that they were not receiving pages with important announcements. An Ombuds investigator reviewed records to confirm that they were not always receiving pages and worked with facility leadership to determine the cause. The facility then retrained staff to ensure that people using medical pagers would receive all pages.



Spiritual Care Policy Revised

The Ombuds for Corrections heard concerns from incarcerated indigenous Minnesotans regarding access to and handling of cultural or spiritual initiatives and events in prisons and jails. The pattern of complaints led to collaboration with the DOC and DOC Tribal Liaison to review policies and make recommendations for better access and process for spiritual care, including:

- expanded access to annual religious meals,
- expanding the number of religious or spiritual care items allowed for incarcerated people, and
- process updates for requesting a religious diet.



Public Report

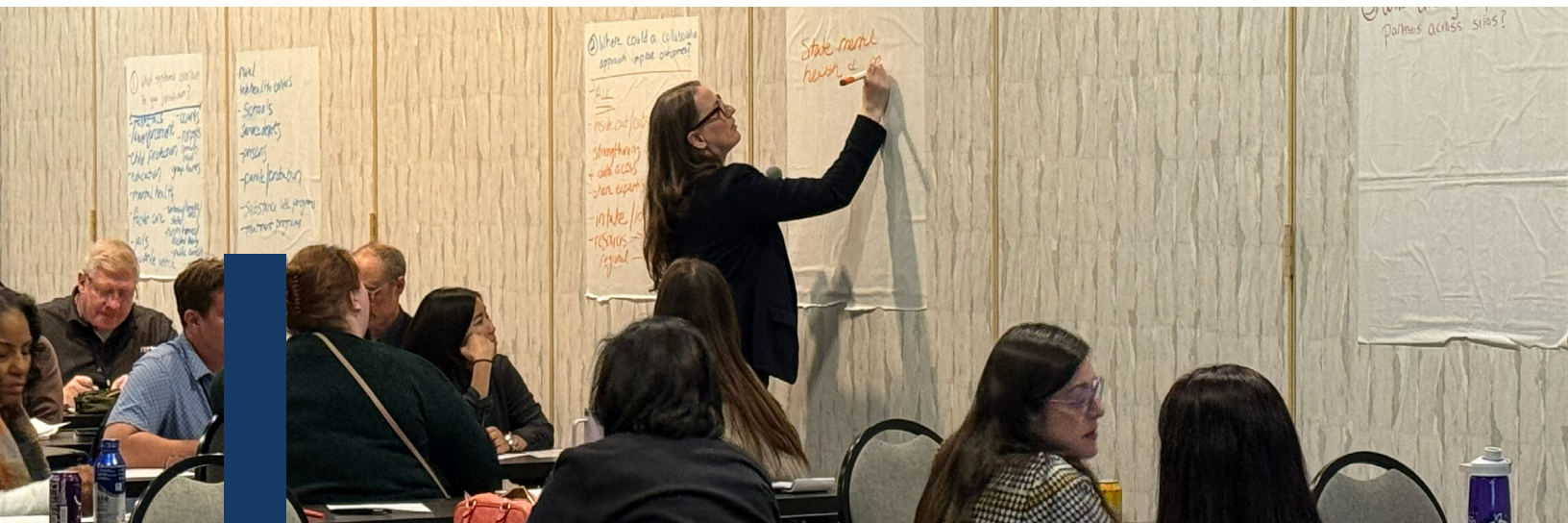
November 2025: [Religious Head Covering Search](#)

This report details the investigation and recommendations developed after a visitor at a state correctional facility was subjected to multiple intrusive searches of her religious head covering in violation of DOC policy. The report highlights the DOC's consultation with the Ombuds for Corrections during implementation of recommendations to provide guidance to staff to ensure:

- visiting and search policy is followed,
- visiting and search policy is updated to become religion-neutral, and
- staff receive training in cultural competency, including overviews of cultural and religious practices.

The DOC accepted the recommendations.

Addressing concerns in this area strengthens protections for people who may be disproportionately affected by inconsistent or inequitable treatment.



Strengthening Policies and Practices

The Ombuds for Corrections engages with community members, task forces, professional associations, and other groups to enhance knowledge and broaden the agency's impact. These activities are essential to the Ombuds' ability to identify systemic issues, recommend meaningful improvements, and drive lasting change across the corrections system.

Photo: Ombudsperson for Corrections Margaret Zadra, standing in center, presented at the United States Ombudsman Conference in October 2025.

Task Forces and Professional Associations

Through participation and leadership in task forces and professional associations, the Ombuds for Corrections shares and gains expertise, promotes evidence-based best practices, and helps strengthen policies and practices across the corrections system. Examples of Ombuds for Corrections involvement in task forces and professional associations include:

State Correctional Facilities Security Audit Group



Chair

The State Correctional Facilities Security Audit Group helps ensure safe and secure conditions in Minnesota's state prisons. It creates security standards for state correctional facilities, reviews inspection reports, and provides recommendations to the Commissioner of Corrections. The Ombudsperson for Corrections is a member and chair of the group. Learn more about the State Correctional Facilities Security Audit Group on the [Minnesota Legislative Reference Library webpage](#).

Chapter 2911 - Jail Facilities Rulemaking Advisory Committee

Member

In 2021, the [Hardel Sherrell Act](#) was enacted in response to the 2018 death of Hardel Sherrell in Beltrami County Jail and other deaths and concerns in jails. The legislation required rulemaking with specific areas of focus, including:

- health and substance use disorder treatment,
- suicide prevention,
- medication management,
- discharge planning,
- well-being checks, and
- procedures for segregation and overdose emergencies.

As a committee member, the Ombudsperson provides advice and input on rules that affect the safety and well-being of people held in jail in Minnesota. Learn more about the [Chapter 2911 Committee on the DOC webpage](#).

Advisory Task Force on Justice Involved Women and Girls

Member

The Advisory Task Force on Justice Involved Women and Girls consults with the Commissioner of Corrections regarding funding of programs, reviews and makes recommendations on matters affecting incarcerated women and girls, identifies problem areas, and assists the Commissioner in seeking improved programming. Learn more about the [Advisory Task Force on Justice Involved Women and Girls](#).



United States Ombudsman Association



United States
Ombudsman Association

Public Safety Chapter Co-Chair

The United States Ombudsman Association supports ombudsmen and ombudsman organizations in improving the operation of ombudsman offices throughout the United States. The Ombudsperson for Corrections serves as co-chair of the Public Safety Chapter. In this role she focuses on building collaboration on issues for justice-impacted youth in corrections as well as sharing information and learning with other ombudsman organizations in the U.S. with jurisdiction over public safety. Learn more about the [United States Ombudsman Association](#).

Prison and Jail Innovation Collaboration of Oversight Professionals

Member



The University of Texas at Austin
Prison and Jail Innovation Lab
Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs

The Prison and Jail Innovation Collaboration of Oversight Professionals is facilitated by the Prison and Jail Innovation Lab, which serves as a catalyst to ensure the safe and humane treatment of people in custody and to cultivate justice policy leaders. The Prison and Jail Innovation Lab is housed at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. Learn more about the [Prison and Jail Innovation Lab](#).

Public Presentations and Meetings

Public presentations and meetings with organizations, agencies, and groups expand the Ombuds for Corrections' impact by sharing information with and getting feedback directly from others who are working to improve public safety, elevating community concerns, and building understanding that supports a safer, fairer, and more accountable corrections system. Examples of public presentations in 2025 include:



Let's Talk About Minnesota's Crumbling Prisons

The Minnesota Justice Research Center hosted a public event including multiple speakers and a community discussion Center in May. Ombudsperson Margaret Zadra presented about the Ombuds for Corrections' public report on crumbling conditions at state correctional facilities, particularly MCF-Stillwater and MCF-St. Cloud.



United States Ombudsman Association Annual Conference

Ombuds for Corrections staff and leaders were accepted to present at three sessions at the annual national conference in October. Topics included using change management to drive systems change, the need for interagency collaboration to address criminalization of mental illness, and sharing challenges and solutions of ombuds offices across the United States.



National Association of Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement Annual Conference

Ombuds for Corrections staff and leaders were invited to join panel discussions at two sessions at the annual national conference in October. Topics included correctional oversight during political pressure and how lived experience can reshape correctional oversight offices. The Ombuds for Corrections also facilitated a tour of MCF-Stillwater for oversight professionals attending this conference.

Community Group and Agency Presentations

Ombuds for Corrections staff regularly present to individual units and teams, agencies, organizations, and learning communities. These presentations help build understanding of the work of the office and provide opportunities to address challenges in the corrections system. Email OBFCcomplaints@state.mn.us to request the Ombuds for Corrections present to your organization, agency, or learning community.



Conclusion

As the Office of the Ombuds for Corrections marks its fifth year of service, this report reflects both the progress made and the work that remains.

Through investigations, recommendations, resolutions, and ensuring effective implementation, the impact of the office extends beyond individual cases and can create change in systems and prevent or reduce future harm. The office's leadership in task forces, groups, and professional associations, as well as engagement with community members, enhances our knowledge and further broadens our impact. In these ways, the office meets our mission to promote the highest attainable standards of competence, efficiency, and justice in the administration of corrections.

In the year ahead, the Ombuds for Corrections will continue addressing individual concerns while advancing systemic improvements. Our office is particularly looking toward more effective mental health care, collaborative opportunities to reduce near-fatalities and deaths, and ways to invest in more efficient and therapeutic state correctional facilities. We remain committed to advancing a fairer, safer, and more accountable corrections system.

Photo: A fence line and road at Minnesota State Correctional Facility-Oak Park Heights, one of 11 state prisons and 150 local correctional facilities over which the Office of the Ombuds for Corrections has jurisdiction.

Appendix A

Complaint Subjects by Facility Type

Complaint subjects are listed below by facility type. Each complaint may include multiple complaint subjects so total of complaint subjects does not equal number of complaints per type of facility.

Complaint Subject	DOC	Local	Other
Accommodations including those for aging and disability	58	17	3
Agency Communication	86	39	20
Air Temperature/HVAC	7	7	-
Assault: Assault by Incarcerated Person	17	6	1
Assault: Assault by Staff	11	16	4
Body Search - Unclothed	7	2	-
CIP Denial	14	-	-
Conditions in Facility	22	27	1
Death Review	16	18	5
Dental Care	8	2	-
Discipline	153	27	2
Discrimination	33	10	2
Early Release Denial	5	-	-
Education	8	-	-
Food Service and Nutrition	29	47	1
Grievance Process	40	20	-

Complaint Subject	DOC	Local	Other
Harassment by Incarcerated Person	12	4	4
Harassment by Staff	67	42	6
Hearing and Release Unit (HRU)	17	-	1
IP Compensation	4	-	-
Indeterminate Sentencing Release Board Review	-	-	13
Jpay	16	1	-
Knowledge Sharing with Other Professionals	6	5	1
Legal Mail, and Legal Calls	25	8	-
Library and Law Library Access or Policies	9	2	-
Mail	10	2	6
Medical Care	166	104	-
Mental Health Care	42	27	1
Mental Health - Priority Admissions for Mental Health Facilities and Rule 20	3	26	4
MnSTARR	3	-	-
Mold	6	1	-
MRRA	8	-	-
Other	45	3	48
Placement (Facility, Unit, or Cell)	54	7	1
PREA Policy or Procedures	14	4	1
Privileges	26	6	1

Complaint Subject	DOC	Local	Other
Programming	14	9	-
Property	42	2	-
Religious Accommodation or Programming	15	11	-
Retaliation	44	5	1
Sexual Abuse and Harassment	15	7	6
Staff Safety	37	5	4
Substance Use Disorder Treatment	10	8	2
Systemic	116	19	1
Transgender Policies	4	2	-
Visiting	43	3	1
Water Quality	17	1	-

Appendix B

How to Submit a Complaint to the Office of the Ombuds for Corrections

Incarcerated people, their loved ones, staff, and community members are welcome to submit complaints to the Ombuds for Corrections regarding local and state correctional facilities.

Incarcerated people

Minnesota Correctional Facilities (MCFs or Prisons)

1. **Follow the Department of Corrections (DOC) grievance process first.**
2. **Submit an OBFC Complaint form.** An Ombuds Complaint form is available in facility libraries or by sending a Kite to the Librarian. Mail as “special mail” to the address on the form. Alternatively, incarcerated people can also sign up to meet with Ombuds staff. Instructions are posted in living units.

Local Correctional Facilities (Jails, Detention Centers, Etc.)

1. **Follow the facility grievance policy first**
2. **Contact the DOC Inspections and Enforcement Department (I&E).** The Ombuds for Corrections is required to refer complaints about local facilities to I&E. If you submit a complaint to us first, we will provide you with information to contact I&E. See <https://mn.gov/doc/about/office-inspector-general/inspection-enforcement-licensing/> for information.
3. **Submit a complaint to the Ombuds for Corrections.** Find forms and more information at <https://mn.gov/obfc/complaints/>

Loved Ones, Staff, and Community Members

We welcome complaints and concerns from staff, loved ones and community members regarding state and local correctional facilities in Minnesota. Please note that we will generally not conduct investigations on behalf of another person without their consent, unless they are unable to consent. However, we can often provide general information about processes and policies. Additionally, information provided by community members is valuable, and those concerns are used to inform investigations.

Submit a complaint in writing

visit <https://mn.gov/obfc/complaints/> for complaint forms. Complete the form and send it through:

Email

OBFCComplaints@state.mn.us

Mail

Office of the Ombuds for Corrections
540 Fairview Ave N., Suite 202
St. Paul, MN 55104

Submit a complaint by phone

Call 651-539-4520 and leave a message. An Ombuds staff member will return your call during regular business hours to accept your complaint.

Find more information about how to submit a complaint and what happens next on our website: <https://mn.gov/>

Promoting the Highest Standards of Justice

Address

540 Fairview Ave N., Suite 202
St. Paul, MN 55104

Email

OBFCcomplaints@state.mn.us

Phone

651-539-4520