JHA Statement on the Recent Infrastructure Assessment of IDOC Facilities
August 3, 2023

Despite the Illinois Department of Corrections’ (IDOC’s) annual operating budget of well over $2 billion, the age and physical state of many of the prisons require billions more to address. This is untenable.

An infrastructure assessment of all the secure IDOC facilities was recently made public. The report titled *Facility Master Plan* was authored by the consulting group CGL. JHA is dismayed but unsurprised by its findings, which in part address our repeated call for an independent assessment of living and work conditions in IDOC and our demands that this information be made public.

Major findings of the May 2023 CGL report echo what JHA has continually heard from people in prisons, observed, and reported on. The age and high levels of deferred maintenance evidenced in many of Illinois’ prisons result in significant physical plant issues and degradation. IDOC lacks appropriate space to accommodate programming and treatment needs. In assessing all of the secure IDOC facilities, CGL notes the dangers, limitations, and concerns presented by current infrastructure and unaddressed physical plant issues. Moreover, the report highlights staffing concerns which make living and working conditions even worse.

While cost projections to address identified problems are presented, importantly this report also makes clear that there is and will be excess bedspace capacity in IDOC. This means that without question not all of the current prisons are needed now or in the future and that Illinois can and should swiftly act to close those that are most decrepit, unsafe, and inhumane.

The CGL report estimates a cost of **$2.5 billion** in repair and replacement expenditures to address the failing prison system infrastructure. The report also states that these deferred maintenance costs can be expected to double every five years. As highlighted in JHA’s 2022 monitoring report on Stateville – just one of IDOC’s approximately century-old prisons – before any money is spent on old, decaying facilities, it is critical that thoughtful decisions be made around in investing in improvements. We cannot continue to Band-Aid issues at facilities that are beyond fixing and can never be made to be appropriate spaces to treat, rehabilitate, or house people in custody. As also recognized by CGL, most of Illinois’
prisons were built before the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Prison Rape Elimination Act became law, resulting in some being out of compliance with legal safeguards and in clear violation of the civil rights of people who suffer because of this.

Beyond these further legal issues are the horrible conditions people incarcerated in Illinois contend with every day: extreme temperatures and poor ventilation; discolored, odorous, and particle-filled water; water damage that leads to roof and ceiling collapse; mold; and many other issues that continually impact the safety, health, and well-being of the people who live and work in our prisons. These issues are regularly shared in JHA’s reports on communications we receive from inside and in results from our surveys of people in custody and correctional staff.

“The building is ‘roach infested.’ Even the ice machine at dietary is ‘full of roaches.’”

– Individual in custody at East Moline

Note: Chart shows % of 12,780 responses
In addition to the dilapidated state of the facilities, serious understaffing throughout IDOC is making both jobs more difficult and life for the people who are incarcerated more deprived due to increased lockdowns and restricted activity and treatment. It is time to reallocate resources, reduce our reliance on incarceration, and shut down prisons that are not fit for any human being to be in, let alone to foster the rehabilitative climate we want for all of Illinois’ citizens.

As we look to the future, JHA again states that Illinois must make sound financial and policy decisions not to invest in failing and decrepit prisons. There are ramifications for facility closures: the local economies of the towns where they are located must be considered, and new sources of employment and revenue generation need to be created to replace prison jobs and related local spending. Supplying jobs should not be why a prison exists. Shoring up economic stability is the job of
government. Illinois should look to other state agencies, such as the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, to lead this work.

Based on his review of the recently released CGL report, Senator Robert Peters stated that, “This report is yet another wakeup call on the dual IDOC crises of mass incarceration and mass infrastructure failure. We need to work immediately to turn these recommendations into action. Neither residents or staff of IDOC nor the general public are well-served by a prison system beset with so many problems. Investing in modernizing facilities and closing outdated prisons are part of the solution to create a Department of Corrections that ensures currently incarcerated people have access to what should be basic human needs and rights.”

Stakeholders, policymakers, and state leaders have an opportunity to work together to reduce the expense and improve outcomes and the human rights of everyone impacted by our prison system. It is neither the responsibility nor function of the Illinois Department of Corrections to determine and implement new community economic drivers to replace prisons. Illinois cannot continue to house and employ people in prisons that pose a danger to everyone inside of them due to degraded and hazardous conditions; the costs are too high when measured in dollars, morality, and our humanity.

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