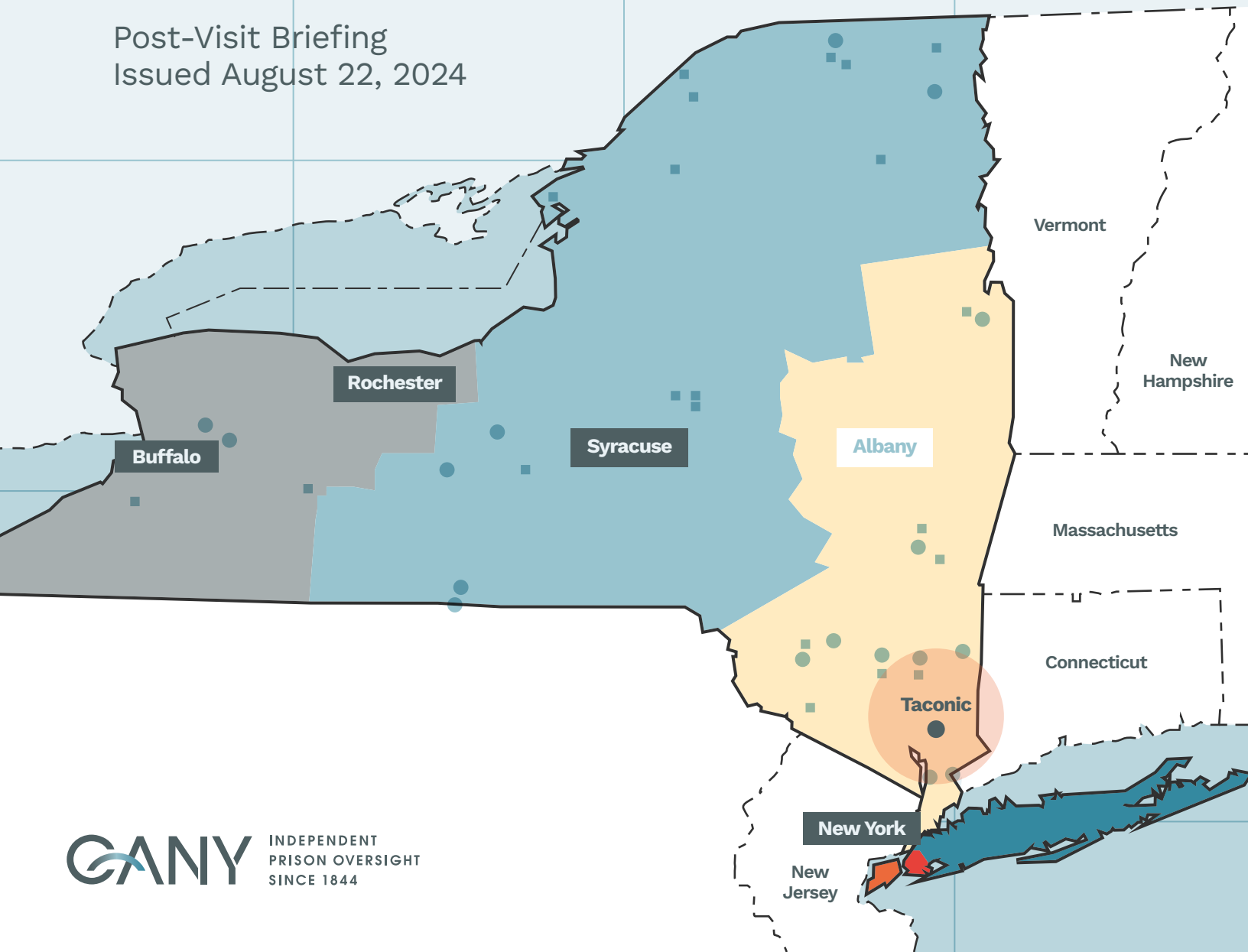


December 7, 2023

# Monitoring Visit to Taconic Correctional Facility

**Correctional Association  
of New York**

Post-Visit Briefing  
Issued August 22, 2024



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## Background

On December 7, 2023, the Correctional Association of New York (CANY) conducted a monitoring visit to Taconic Correctional Facility, a medium-security facility for adult women in Bedford Hills, New York, located in the town of Bedford. CANY's monitoring visit to Taconic was conducted as part of its oversight mandate pursuant to Correctional Law §146(3).

During the monitoring visit, CANY representatives held meetings with the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) facility executive team. CANY also held meetings with the Incarcerated Liaison Committee (ILC) and the Incarcerated Grievance Resolution Committee (IGRC).<sup>1</sup> CANY conducted visual observations of housing units, the mess hall, the visiting room, academic and vocational classrooms, and the general library. These meetings allowed CANY to gain a better understanding of Taconic's policies, procedures, and practices.

On the day of CANY's visit, there were 188 people in custody at Taconic. The CANY visiting party carried out 40 interviews with incarcerated individuals in general population housing areas, representing over 20% of the population.

## Impressions from Visit

Below are the initial impressions from the visit to Taconic that CANY representatives reported to the DOCCS facility executive team during a conference call following the monitoring visit.<sup>2</sup> CANY representatives compiled this list of impressions by identifying recurrent issues discussed with both staff and incarcerated individuals, as well as issues that appeared to be significant, regardless of prevalence. The impressions touch on the following themes: (1) programming, (2) health care, (3) basic services, and (4) material conditions and environmental issues. A version of these impressions was also emailed to DOCCS' central office and mailed to the ILC and IGRC groups following the visit.<sup>3</sup>

### Programming

- **Reentry.** Several incarcerated individuals reported concerns about a lack of reentry services or barriers to accessing support for reentry including not hearing back after writing to counselors and not being eligible for services if returning to counties outside of New York City. CANY representatives also observed that there were only a small number of individuals in the reentry unit at the time of the visit. The executive team explained that the reentry unit's population was limited due to an ongoing construction project. They reported that placement in the reentry unit is controlled by DOCCS central office. Additionally, they clarified that while the reentry unit is solely for individuals returning to the Lower Hudson area, the reentry program was for anyone returning to counties outside

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1 Union representatives at Taconic Correctional Facility declined CANY's invitation to meet.

2 CANY met virtually with Taconic executive team on December 20, 2023.

3 The term "Central Office" used in this report refers to the department administration and executive team located in Albany.

of New York City. Individuals in the reentry unit receive Phase III programming and there are also resources kept in both the general and law libraries. They also cited a robust support system from volunteers in the Westchester area.

- **Education.** CANY representatives expressed positive impressions of the college offerings provided by Bard and Hudson Link.
- **Other Programming.** Several incarcerated individuals reported a lack of structured programming opportunities. The executive team reiterated that they were working to fill the cosmetology instructor vacancy. Space constraints and staffing shortages have presented challenges to offering more programming. They also cited robust volunteer-led programming offered through partnerships with organizations such as Rehabilitation Through the Arts and Hour Children.

## Healthcare

- **Dental.** Many incarcerated individuals reported not receiving the dental care they needed, with some citing not receiving responses to callouts and others being told their only option was to have teeth pulled rather than more preventive care. The executive team explained that the dentist position had been vacant for two years since the previous dentist retired in 2021. They did not have a hygienist; they had a dental assistant, which was a more administrative position. The executive team reported that they were recently approved to hire a full-time, rather than part-time, dentist and they had submitted a candidate to DOCCS' central office for approval. They anticipated a start date of January 2024.
- **Nursing.** Multiple incarcerated individuals alleged that nurses had reported false positive HIV results to patients before revealing that it was intended as a joke. The executive team acknowledged that they had received one complaint about such an incident. CANY representatives encouraged the executive team to conduct an investigation.
- **Medication.** Some incarcerated individuals cited not being able to receive their medication when needed. CANY representatives inquired about any possible medication shortages. The executive team clarified that individuals have one to two weeks to request a medication refill and failing to do so could result in a lapse in medication. Medication requests are first processed at Bedford Hills, which takes some time. They suggested that some individuals might be consuming "self-carry" medications faster than prescribed and thus run out of medication before a refill can be granted.
- **Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT).** Some incarcerated individuals expressed concerns that certain housing units were receiving their MAT medication in the late afternoon and that it was having adverse effects. Some individuals also cited poor treatment from staff relating to their status in the MAT program. The executive team explained that approximately 50 individuals were participating in MAT, which is too many people

to process alongside regular sick call. Instead, they distribute MAT during morning and afternoon count, at 11:10am and 4:00pm. They stated that they had not heard any concerns related to the stigmatization of MAT participants.

### Basic Services

- **Visits.** CANY representatives observed impressive program offerings and services provided by Hour Children for parents and children. Some incarcerated individuals reported that family members must wait long periods outside in inclement weather before being admitted for a visit. The executive team cited space constraints since Taconic does not have a visitor hospitality center. They explained that they bring out a tent on particularly sunny days to provide shade and that they could consider doing so on rainy days as well.
- **Packages.** Multiple incarcerated individuals expressed concerns about the restrictions on getting cosmetics in packages resulting from the May 2023 update to Directive 4911.<sup>4</sup> The executive team acknowledged the effect this is having on the population and suggested that they were looking forward to the return of the cosmetology program which would provide incarcerated people greater access to cosmetics.
- **Staff-incarcerated individual interactions.** CANY representatives observed staff in housing units making themselves accessible to the population and attempting to resolve concerns. Multiple staff members expressed satisfaction working at Taconic.
- **Security protocols.** Several incarcerated individuals cited changes to security protocols in the preceding six months including having to present photo identification into cameras while being escorted. The executive team explained that they had updated movement protocols in their most recent Facility Operations Manual and reported they had distributed a memo to the population outlining these changes and had discussed them with the ILC. They explained that because Taconic does not utilize a pass system, showing identification into the cameras can validate whether individuals are traveling to their designated locations.

### Material and Environmental Conditions

- **Air quality.** Multiple incarcerated individuals expressed concerns about fumes coming from a nearby asphalt factory. Medical staff explained that there is a high rate of asthma among the incarcerated population. The executive team acknowledged that the factory is quite close to Taconic and that the fumes are noticed by staff and incarcerated people alike.

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4 NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision. (2023). Directive: Packages and Articles Sent to Facilities (No. 4911). [https://doccs.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2024/06/4911\\_0.pdf](https://doccs.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2024/06/4911_0.pdf)

## Taconic Correctional Facility

Taconic Correctional Facility is in the hamlet of Bedford Hills, in the town of Bedford, in Westchester County. According to DOCCS Directive 0055, Taconic is used for general confinement of females 18 years and older. Taconic features a variety of housing unit types: single cells, single rooms, multiple occupancy rooms, and dormitories.<sup>5</sup> On the day of CANY's monitoring visit there were 188 people in custody at Taconic.

During CANY's visit, the executive team answered questions about Taconic's layout, capital projects, programs, staff, and incarcerated population. CANY supplemented the information reported by the executive team by reviewing administrative datasets obtained via Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request. CANY uses these datasets to compare the demographic characteristics of the Taconic population and incidents reported in Taconic to those of the entire DOCCS system.

### Physical Layout

Taconic has nine housing units. However, two units were not in use at the time of CANY's visit: one had been consolidated due to general decreases in the prison population, and another, the reentry unit, was temporarily closed due to a shower construction project; the six individuals assigned to the reentry unit were temporarily rehoused in a general population unit. Most of Taconic's active units consist of single cells and house individuals in general population; one unit was dedicated to the Alcohol and Substance Abuse Treatment (ASAT) program.

### Capital Projects

The executive team answered questions about completed and future projects. At the time of CANY's visit, there were cameras in all housing units, school, medical, and the mess hall. Every correction officer and supervisor had body cameras. CANY representative observed signs throughout the facility which alerted when body cameras should be turned on. Current projects included renovating the showers in one housing unit, replacing the front gate building, and expanding the CCTV camera system. Upcoming and future projects included implementing a civilian personal alarm system, updating the staff training building, constructing a new program building, replacing windows and roofs, and updating wiring in general population units to offer Wi-Fi calling on tablets scheduled for late March 2024.

### Programs

The executive team described the academic, vocational, re-entry, and arts programs available at the facility. Table 2 below summarizes the programs listed by the executive team and any additional discussion of a particular program. Often, this discussion arose from follow-up questions posed by CANY representatives during the executive team meeting and program area walkthroughs.

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<sup>5</sup> During CANY's visit, only the units with single cells were in operation. NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision. (2023). Taconic Correctional Facility (No. 0055). <https://doccs.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2023/05/0055.pdf>

Table 2. Programs Listed by Taconic Executive Team

Type	Program	Additional Discussion
<b>Vocational</b>	Computer Operator	This is a six-month certificate program. At the time of CANY's visit, there were 12 people enrolled and there was a short waitlist for the program. Entry to the program was prioritized by an incarcerated individual's earliest release date and whether an individual needed the program to qualify for merit time.
	Cosmetology	Participants can earn a NYS Cosmetology license and receive a supply kit upon release. As of December 2024, the program had not been operating for one year due to an instructor vacancy; the executive team reported having recently submitted two candidates with an anticipated start date in January 2024.
	Paint Shop	At the time of CANY's visit, there were eight people enrolled and there was a short waitlist for the program. Entry to the program was being prioritized by earliest release date and whether an individual needed the program to qualify for merit time.
<b>Academic</b>	Adult Basic Education (ABE)	
	Pre-High School Equivalency (Pre-GED)	
	High School Equivalency (HSE)	
	College Program	<p>Bard College provides college courses toward an Associate of Arts degree. At the time of CANY's visit, there were 30 people enrolled. Bard maintains a computer lab for study groups and independent work; students can submit a request ("callout") to use the lab. Lab computers have word processing and access to the intranet, but not the internet. Bard College also maintains a garden on site.</p> <p>Hudson Link provides college courses toward a 68-credit Associate of Arts degree through Marymount Manhattan College. At the time of CANY's visit, there were 55 people enrolled. Hudson Link maintains a computer lab for study groups and independent work; students can submit a request ("callout") to use the lab. Lab computers have word processing but no internet.</p>
<b>Re-Entry</b>	Transitional Services Program (Phases I, II & III)	
	Medicaid enrollment	
	Non-driver ID	
	Reentry Program	The reentry program is for people being released into the Lower Hudson Area to counties outside of New York City.
	Volunteer-Led Programs	<p>The Osborne Association provides a reentry program called Reentry Works which serves people going back to NYC.</p> <p>Hour Children provides post-release aftercare and support to individuals leaving Taconic.</p>
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	Additional Programs	<p>Taconic shares Family Reunion Program facilities with Bedford Hills.</p> <p>Rehabilitation Through the Arts provides acting, knitting, music, poetry, and yoga classes one day per week in the evenings.</p> <p>Hour Children provides parenting classes, book club, support group, legal services volunteers, educational advocacy for parents with school-age children, transportation and hosting kids overnight for visits, and holiday and birthday gift drives. At the time of CANY's visit, they were serving 117 active participants who together had 150 children total.</p>
Source: The information in this table was compiled from CANY representative notes from the initial meeting with the executive team and program areas walkthrough on December 7, 2024.		

## Staffing

The executive team answered questions about their security, medical, mental health, program and administrative staffing needs. Staffing details are included in the table below.<sup>6</sup>

Table 3.

Staffing Numbers Reported by Taconic Executive Team December 7, 2023				
CATEGORY	POSITION	# FILLED	BUDGETED FILL LEVEL (BFL)	OUT ON LEAVE
Security	Captain	1	1	0
	Sergeant	10	10	2
	Lieutenant	8	8	1
	Correction Officer	119	119	20
Subtotal		138	138	23
Notes	Twenty correction officers, one lieutenant and two sergeants were out on leave. According to DOCCS administrative data, as of April 6, 2023, there were 141 security staff filled out of a BFL of 139.			
CATEGORY	POSITION	# FILLED	BUDGETED FILL LEVEL (BFL)	OUT ON LEAVE
Medical	Physician	2	2	1
	Nurse Administrator	1	1	0
	Nurse	3	7	0
	Dentist	0	1	0
	Dental Assistant	1	1	0
Subtotal		7	12	1
Notes	One nurse vacancy was being filled by an agency nurse. One doctor was out on leave. The dentist position had been vacant since the previous dentist retired in 2021. According to DOCCS administrative data, as of April 6, 2023, there were 9 health services staff filled out of a BFL of 11.			
CATEGORY	POSITION	# FILLED	BUDGETED FILL LEVEL (BFL)	OUT ON LEAVE
Mental Health	Unit Chief	1	1	0
	Psychiatrist	1	1	0
	Social Worker	1	2	0
	Office Aide	1	1	1
Subtotal		4	5	1
CATEGORY	POSITION	# FILLED	BUDGETED FILL LEVEL (BFL)	OUT ON LEAVE
Program	Vocational Instructor	2	3	0

<sup>6</sup> The BFL numbers reported are based on notes taken by CANY staff during conversations with the executive team, these numbers are verbally reported during the meeting and verified by CANY staff with the most recent DOCCS staffing data available.



	Academic Instructor	2	3	0
	Educational Supervisor	1	1	0
	Offender Rehabilitation Counselor (ORC)	4	5	0
	Recreation Aide	2	2	0
	Chaplain	4	4	0
	Librarian	0	1	0
	Grievance Supervisor	1	1	0
	Deputy Superintendent of Programs	1	1	0
	Supervising Offender Rehabilitation Counselor	1	1	0
	Program Aide	0	1	0
	Offender Rehabilitation Aide	0	1	0
	LM Social Worker	0	1	0
	ASAT PA	0	1	0
	Store and Mail Clerks	0	2	0
	Clerical Staff	1	2	0
Subtotal		19	30	0
Notes	The two ORC vacancies were comprised of one general ORC and one ASAT ORC. The librarian vacancy was currently being covered by recreation staff while the facility interviewed for the position. The four chaplains were being shared with Bedford Hills. According to DOCCS administrative data, as of April 6, 2023, there were 18 program services staff filled out of a BFL 33. According to a more detailed staffing report issued July 2, 2023, vacancies were evenly distributed throughout program services except for five vacancies in alcohol and substance abuse treatment.			
Administrative	The executive team also reported that they had three business office staff and four vacancies, two vacancies each in personnel and the mess hall; they were fully staffed with nine maintenance workers. According to DOCCS administrative data, as of April 6, 2023, there were 23 support services staff filled out of a BFL of 29.			
Source: The information in this table is compiled from CANY representative notes from the initial meeting with the executive team and the DOCCS biweekly staffing report dated April 6, 2023.				

During the monitoring visit, CANY representatives conducted informal conversations with security staff throughout the facility. Staff morale appeared to be relatively high at Taconic. Multiple staff members expressed their satisfaction and appreciation for working at Taconic. One staff member said working at Taconic was a much more relaxed environment than at other facilities where they had previously worked.

## Population

Per the executive team, the facility's capacity is 376 incarcerated people. On the day of the visit, December 7, 2023, the executive team reported that there were 188 people in custody. The OMH monthly facility caseload report for December 2023 showed that 62% (111/178) of the population at Taconic was on the OMH caseload.

CANY reviewed an administrative dataset, “Incarcerated Individuals Under Custody,” to (1) supplement the information reported by the executive team and (2) compare the demographic characteristics of the Taconic population with that of the rest of the New York State prison population. “Incarcerated Individuals Under Custody” represents the individuals under the custody of DOCCS on a particular day. CANY reviewed the data file from December 1, 2023, the closest available file to the visit date.

According to DOCCS under custody data, on December 1, 2023, there were 187 people incarcerated at Taconic. The administrative data reflects the trends described by the executive team—98% (174/187) of the population is housed in general population units and the remaining 2% (13/187) is housed in the reentry unit. According to the medical staff, there were 14 people at Taconic who identified as transgender.

## Unusual Incidents and Deaths

CANY reviewed: (1) DOCCS’ unusual incident data for January through November of 2023 and (2) State Commission of Correction’s (SCOC) death data, which reflects a more complete record of deaths in DOCCS facilities, as some deaths in custody do not necessarily trigger an unusual incident report.<sup>7</sup> SCOC data shows that no deaths occurred at Taconic in 2023 through the end of November.<sup>8</sup>

The unusual incidents data reveals that the rates of (1) lost/stolen property, and (2) drugs/alcohol are slightly higher at Taconic than that of the system. The rates of (1) refused instruction/refused strip frisk, and (2) accident are equivalent to the systemwide rate. Rates of all other unusual incidents are lower at Taconic compared to the system overall.

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<sup>7</sup> DOCCS defines an unusual incident in Directive 4004 as, “a serious occurrence that (1) may impact upon or disrupt facility operations, or (2) has the potential for affecting the Department’s public image, or (3) might arouse widespread public interest. In general, any incident shall be reportable under the provisions of this directive which (1) satisfies the definition (above) of ‘unusual incident,’ or (2) involves the use of chemical weapons, or (3) involves staff use of a weapon, or (4) results in moderate or serious injury to any incarcerated individual/releasee or staff;NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision. (2023). Directive: Unusual Incident Report (No. 4004).

<sup>8</sup> SCOC’s death data reflects a more complete record of deaths because, pursuant to [New York Correction Law, section 47\(1\)](#), the SCOC’s correction medical review board is responsible for (1) investigating and reviewing the cause and circumstances surrounding the death of an incarcerated person in a correctional facility and (2) submit a report thereon to the commission and to the governor.

Table 4. Unusual Incidents, January – November, 2023

Type	Incident	Taconic		System Wide	
		Count	Avg. Monthly Rate 1K PPL. in Custody	Count	Avg. Monthly Rate 1K PPL. in Custody
Assaults	Assault on Incarcerated Individual	1	0.5	1,699	4.9
	Assault on Staff	5	2.4	1,200	3.4
	Other Assault	0	0.0	8	0.0
Contraband	Drugs/Alcohol	3	1.4	355	1
	Weapons	0	0.0	2,338	6.8
	Other	0	0.0	382	1
Disruptive Behavior	Refused Instruction/ Refused Strip Frisk	7	3.4	1,248	3.6
	Cell Extraction	0	0.0	200	0.6
	Other	0	0.0	231	0.7
Facility Disruption	Accident	2	1.0	355	1.0
	Lost/Stolen Property	1	0.5	63	0.2
	Fire	0	0.0	22	1.0
Health-Related	Use of Narcan	1	0.5	556	1.6
	Use of AED	0	0.0	98	0.3
	Contagious Disease	1	0.5	145	0.4
Self-Harm & Suicide	Self-Inflicted Injury	0	0.0	52	0.1
	Suicide Attempts	0	0.0	107	0.3
	Suicides	0	0.0	4	0.0
Staff Use of Force	Use of Other Weapon	7	3.4	1,781	5.1
	Use of Baton	0	0.0	113	0.3
	Use of Chemical Irritant	0	0.0	193	0.6
Source: DOCCS Unusual Incident Reports, January – November 2023					

## Findings from Interview Data

CANY staff analyzed the interviews conducted on the monitoring visit to better understand (1) the provision of basic services, (2) medical and dental health care, (3) mental health care, (4) programming, (5) staff-incarcerated individual interactions, (6) grievances, (7) discipline, and (8) material conditions at Taconic. Below are the findings from the interview data.

### Basic Provision of Services

1. While most respondents reported commissary was adequately stocked, most expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of variety.
2. More than half of respondents reported not being able to access items from packages in a timely manner.
3. While most people at Taconic reported being afforded three meals a day, many people expressed dissatisfaction with the food quality and consequently sought out costly alternatives.
4. Nearly all respondents reported being able to access phones and tablets.
5. Many respondents indicated they have access to in-person visits; the proportion of respondents who reported having access to in-person visits is higher at Taconic compared to other medium security prisons.

### Medical and Dental Healthcare

6. A lower share of respondents reported adequate medical and dental care at Taconic, compared to other medium- security facilities. Many respondents reported concerns regarding issues with medication, and inaccessibility of dental care.

### Mental Health

7. While a relatively high share of respondents reported being on the OMH caseload, many respondents reported not getting the mental health programs that they need or expressed desire for more mental health programming and support.

### Programming and Recreation

8. Respondents reported an overall lack of programming and/or poor-quality programming including a need to update outdated vocational and substance abuse programs and offer more reentry services. Respondents positively reviewed volunteer-led and higher education programs.

## Staff-Incarcerated Individual Interactions

9. Some incarcerated individuals reported mixed experience with staff, others reported abuse of authority, lack of accountability, and poor and dehumanizing treatment by staff.

## Grievances

10. Incarcerated people at Taconic expressed a lack of confidence in the grievance process.

## Discipline

11. Overall, incarcerated people perceived the disciplinary process at Taconic to be unfair and biased.

## Material Conditions and Environmental Issues

12. The safety of Taconic's drinking water was a prevalent environmental concern among respondents. Additionally, when asked about the adequacy of Taconic's temperature controls, many respondents described experiencing extreme temperatures in the facility.

# Anaylsis of Interview Data

This analysis of interview data supports the impressions that CANY representatives presented to the executive team and raises questions about four interrelated issues: (1) people's ability to access medical and dental care, (2) concerns about material conditions, (3) lack of programming at Taconic, and (4) staff-incarcerated individual interactions. Taconic's small size and program staffing shortages present challenges to facility operations, contributing to concerns about the lack of programming and the availability of medical care. To gauge whether the responses at Taconic mirror those at other medium-security prisons, CANY compared close-ended responses collected on this visit to those collected at other medium-security prisons between January 2022 and October 2023, including Albion, Fishkill, and Mohawk.

## Basic Provision Of Services

CANY representatives asked incarcerated people in general population units about their access to services such as commissary, packages, food, phone calls, and visits. Below are the findings and responses to those questions.

Table 5. Provision of Basic Services

Questions	Responses					
	YES		NO		TOTAL	
	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count
Is the <b>commissary</b> adequately stocked with items on a regular basis?	63%	17	37%	10	100%	27
Are you able to access items from <b>packages</b> in a timely manner?	48%	14	52%	15	100%	29
Are you receiving three <b>meals</b> per day in adequate portions?	90%	27	10%	3	100%	30
Are you able to make <b>phone calls</b> , either by using the phones or through a tablet?	94%	30	6%	2	100%	32
Do you receive in-person <b>visits</b> ?	91%	31	9%	3	100%	34

## Commissary

**1** While most respondents reported commissary was adequately stocked, most expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of variety.

Concerns related to the commissary are common across facilities. Sixty-three percent (63%, 17/27) of respondents at Taconic agreed that the commissary is adequately stocked on a regular basis. This is a higher rate compared to 39% (16/41) at Fishkill, 37% (11/30) at Mohawk, and 21% (13/69) at Albion.

### Lack of variety and spoiled food

When asked to elaborate on their experiences with the commissary, 70% (19/27) of respondents cited problems such as lack of variety (15 individuals) and receiving spoiled food (6 individuals). Eleven individuals reported positive experiences with the commissary, including the availability of fruits and vegetables.

One prevalent theme that respondents raised was the lack of variety in the commissary (15 individuals). Many respondents described the commissary list at Taconic as basic compared to other facilities like Bedford and Albion. There was an impression among incarcerated people at Taconic that the commissary lists at male facilities offer more variety than at female facilities.

## Packages

**2** More than half of respondents reported not being able to access items from packages in a timely manner.

Forty-eight percent (48%, 14/29) of respondents at Taconic reported getting packages in a timely manner, a lower share compared to 63% (17/27) at Mohawk and 56% (23/41) at Fishkill.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, the ILC and IGRC raised concerns about the restrictions on cosmetics included in the latest directive.<sup>10</sup> According to the directive, only translucent face powder and clear lipstick are allowed. Incarcerated individuals at Taconic believe this restriction disproportionately affects people of color, because translucent powders are not always as translucent as promised, leaving women with darker skin tones looking pale. The executive team acknowledged the effect this was having on the population and suggested that they were looking forward to the return of the cosmetology program which would provide incarcerated people greater access to cosmetics. The executive team reported that the cosmetology program had been closed for a year due to an instructor vacancy. At the time of CANY's visit, they had selected a candidate and were anticipating this person starting in January 2024.

### **Perception of arbitrary denials, allegations of theft, and slow processing times**

Seven individuals cited positive experiences with packages. Many other respondents reported concerns with packages (23 instances). These concerns involved a perception of arbitrary denials (4 instances), allegations that items are missing due to theft (10 instances), and concerns with the length of wait time prior to receiving packages (9 instances).

One individual reported an example, “there are times when I haven’t gotten things at all.” One person said in the last three months she ordered six packages and had only received one of them. Another individual reported that she had received a package in December that she ordered in June.

## **Food**

**3** While most people at Taconic reported being afforded three meals a day, many people expressed dissatisfaction with the food quality and consequently sought out costly alternatives.

Reports of receiving three meals per day were relatively high in most medium-security facilities. Ninety percent (90%, 27/30) of respondents at Taconic reported receiving three meals per day; a higher share compared to 66% (27/41) at Fishkill and 86% (25/29) at Mohawk.

### **Poor quality and unhealthy food options**

When asked to elaborate on their experience with the facility’s food service, over half of these same respondents indicated problems with food quality (21 individuals). Six individuals indicated that they avoid eating at the mess hall whenever possible, suggesting that some of their meals come from commissary purchases rather than the facility’s food service. Three individuals cited insufficient food quantities. Three individuals said food portions are “barely enough.” Another individual reported she often goes to bed hungry.

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9 CANY did not ask this question at Albion.

10 NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision. (2023). Directive: Packages and Articles Sent to Facilities (No. 4911). [https://doccs.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2024/06/4911\\_0.pdf](https://doccs.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2024/06/4911_0.pdf).

Seventy percent (70%, 21/30) of respondents expressed concerns about the quality and nutritional value of the food served at the mess hall. A small subset of these respondents expressed concerns about health risks, claiming that the mess hall food contained excessive quantities of soy (5 instances).

- ▶ “I don’t eat the prison food; I cook my own food”
- ▶ “Food not healthy, not enough nutrition in this food”
- ▶ “meat is not real meat”

The ILC and IGRC reported several concerns with the food served in the mess hall including cold food and insufficient quantities. CANY representatives observed a low turnout during lunch in the mess hall. Most housing units had a microwave and a hotplate. CANY representatives observed incarcerated individuals cooking meals in the housing units.

## Phones & Tablets

**4** Nearly all respondents reported being able to access phones and tablets.

Most respondents in medium-security prisons reported being able to use phones or tablets to make calls. The share of respondents in general population units who reported being able to use phones or tablets to make calls was 100% (41/41) at Fishkill, 100% (29/29) at Mohawk, 94% (30/32) at Taconic, and 92% (54/59) at Albion.

The executive team told CANY that the wiring to add Wi-Fi to the facility will allow incarcerated people to make phone calls via the tablet as announced by the Department in October 2023.<sup>11</sup> The facility anticipated being able to start by March 2024.

## Visits

**5** Many respondents indicated they have access to in-person visits; the proportion of respondents who reported having access to in-person visits is higher at Taconic compared to other medium security prisons.

Ninety-one percent (91%, 31/34) of respondents at Taconic reported having access to in-person visits. This is a higher share compared to 79% (45/57) at Albion, 76% (31/41) at Fishkill, and 57% (16/28) at Mohawk.

### **Incidents impacting incarcerated people and their visitors**

Despite incarcerated people reporting having access to in-person visits, a small number of

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<sup>11</sup> In October 2023, DOCCS announced it would expand its ability to allow phone calls via tablets for all incarcerated individuals. The department will first implement this at the three female facilities in early 2024 and then expand to the remainder of the facilities.



incarcerated people reported incidents that impacted their visitors (4 instances). One individual stated that families must wait outside in the cold, heat, or rain for long periods with no shelter. The ILC and IGRC also reported an increase in strip frisks after attending events in the visiting room. The executive team explained that they had updated movement protocols in their most recent Facility Operating Manual and reported they had distributed a memo to the population outlining these changes and had discussed them with the ILC.

The executive team cited space constraints during visitor processing because Taconic does not have a visitor hospitality center. They explained that they bring out a tent on particularly sunny days to provide shade and that they could consider doing so on rainy days as well. CANY representatives visited the children's center at Taconic which is run by Hour Children and heard positive reports about programs such as the holiday gift drive and transportation for visits which helps parents stay connected with their children. Hour Children representatives at Taconic reported they had 117 individuals participating in their programs representing 150 children in total.

## Healthcare

**6** A lower share of respondents reported adequate medical and dental care at Taconic, compared to other medium-security facilities. Many respondents reported concerns regarding issues with medication and inaccessibility of dental care.

A lower share of the respondents at Taconic reported satisfaction with medical care received: only 42% (8/19) reported receiving adequate medical care, compared to 75% (15/20) at Mohawk and 62% (21/34) at Fishkill.<sup>12</sup> The share of respondents who reported satisfaction with dental care was also lower, with only 9% (1/11) reporting adequate dental care, compared to 74% (20/27) at Fishkill, and 60% (6/10) at Mohawk.<sup>13</sup>

While most respondents stated that providers had responded to their requests for medical and dental care, 83% (20/24) and 75% (12/16) respectively, many reported long wait times. Thirteen respondents provided further information regarding response times for medical treatment. While the majority received a response within two to seven days of submitting their request, four respondents reported waiting over a month (See Table 6). Particularly long wait times for dental treatment were also reported: two of the nine respondents reported receiving a response within two weeks, while the other seven reported waiting longer than a month. This is consistent with the executive team's report of one dental vacancy, meaning that the dentist from Bedford was being shared with Taconic at the time of CANY's visit.

<sup>12</sup> CANY did not ask this question at Albion.

<sup>13</sup> CANY did not ask this question at Albion.

Table 6. Medical and Dental Healthcare

Questions	Responses					
	YES		NO		TOTAL	
	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count
If you requested <b>medical</b> care, have you received a response?	83%	20	17%	4	100%	24
If you requested <b>dental</b> care, have you received a response?	751%	12	25%	4	100%	16
Do you have unaddressed <b>medical</b> or <b>dental</b> needs?	70%	16	30%	7	100%	23

	YES		NO		N/A		TOTAL	
	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count
If you have received <b>medical</b> care, was the level of care adequate?	42%	8	58%	11	0%	0	100%	19
If you have received <b>dental</b> care, was the level of care adequate?	9%	1	73%	8	18%	2	100%	11
Are you receiving medication as prescribed, including scheduling and dosage?	64%	16	24%	6	12%	3	100%	25

	2 DAYS		1 WEEK		2 WEEKS		1 MONTH		>1 MONTH		TOTAL	
	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count
If you have recieved <b>medical</b> care, how long did it take to get care?	54%	7	15%	2	0%	0	0%	0	31%	4	100%	13
If you <i>have not</i> received <b>medical</b> care, how long has your request been outstanding?	0%	0	0%	0	50%	1	0%	0	50%	1	100%	2
If you have recieved <b>dental</b> care, how long did it take to get care?	0%	0	0%	0	20%	2	10%	1	70%	7	100%	10
If you <i>have not</i> received <b>dental</b> care, how long has your request been outstanding?	50%	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	50%	1	100%	2

On the day of CANY's visit, the executive team reported medical staffing consisting of one physician, one nurse administrator, three staff nurses, and one agency nurse. They reported three nursing vacancies and one physician out on leave. The medical team raised concerns about staffing, explaining that although a physician visits from Bedford Hills once a week to supplement, staffing vacancies present a barrier to service delivery.

The executive team also reported that they had not had a dentist since 2021. Although Taconic had a dental assistant, the executive team explained that this position is administrative and does not provide dental services. They explained that a dentist comes from Bedford Hills on rotation to

respond to sick calls, or alternatively patients can be transferred to Bedford Hills in an emergency. The dental vacancy issue was raised by the IGRC and ILC, who noted that incarcerated individuals are unable to access either dental cleanings or emergency dental services at Taconic.

The medical team reported 50 people enrolled in the MAT program on the day of CANY's visit. This is approximately 27% (50/188) of the Taconic population. This enrollment rate is higher than those observed at other medium-security prisons visited by CANY in 2023, including 18% (200/1142) at Mohawk and 10% (136/1307) at Fishkill.<sup>14</sup> In a meeting with the executive team, CANY learned that there had been challenges coordinating the administration of MAT medications for such a large group alongside regular sick call. To address these challenges, the executive team explained that they distribute MAT during morning and afternoon counts, at 11:10 am and 4:00 pm. Some incarcerated individuals in the IGRC and ILC expressed concerns that receiving MAT medication in the late afternoon was having adverse effects, including affecting people's sleep.

#### **Perception of substandard care or harsh treatment**

When asked to elaborate on their experiences with medical and dental care, there was a perception among respondents that the care provided was substandard (21 individuals) and many reports of harsh treatment (16 individuals). For example, many respondents raised specific concerns with medical staff (15 instances), citing concerns about staff being "hostile and aggressive," or "rude and disrespectful." CANY heard multiple complaints (13 individuals) regarding the two nurses, including two individuals who reported unethical conduct, alleging that nurses shared false HIV results as a joke. CANY raised this alleged incident with the executive team, who confirmed they had received a complaint about the issue relating to false HIV results.

#### **Problems accessing prescription medication**

Many people in general population units also raised concerns regarding problems with medications (15 individuals), including not being able to access medications as prescribed. Three individuals reported challenges accessing prescribed pain medications. One person also reported concerns regarding her prescription for MAT medication suboxone, claiming that when her prescription runs out, they give her other people's prescriptions.

The executive team advised that they were not aware of any medication shortages that would be affecting access to prescription medication. However, they explained that there is a one-to-two-week timeframe for prescription refills, because the requests are sent to Bedford Hills to be filled. If incarcerated people do not put in a refill request far enough in advance, there could be a lapse in medications. The executive team also suggested that some incarcerated people could be taking "self-carry" medications faster than prescribed, making it difficult to refill immediately.

#### **Lack of dental care**

Many respondents reported unsatisfactory dental services (15 individuals). Incarcerated individuals reported that they cannot receive dental care, or that when they do receive attention, there is no

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<sup>14</sup> Enrollment numbers in MAT are based on numbers reported by the executive team at each facility on the day of the CANY monitoring visit.

routine or preventative care available. As noted above, CANY representatives were advised by the executive team that the dental position had been vacant since 2021, and the majority of services being provided (at Bedford Hills) are emergent rather than routine. The executive team confirmed that they were given approval to employ a full-time dentist and were hopeful of a January 2024 start date.

#### **Rates of asthma and smoke inhalation**

CANY representatives heard many reports regarding concerns about asthma caused or exacerbated by smoke inhalation (4 instances), including one individual who said: “The chemical factory here has made my asthma so much worse. I got here in 2022 and now I use a pump all the time!” The executive team confirmed that there is a nearby asphalt factory, which they described as their “closest neighbor.” They agreed that both staff and incarcerated people can smell fumes emitting from the factory in the summer when it is running. The medical team acknowledged that they have a “high rate” of asthma among incarcerated individuals but did not directly attribute this to the factory.

## **Mental Health Care**

**7** While a relatively high share of respondents reported being on the OMH caseload, many respondents reported not getting the mental health programs that they need or expressed desire for more mental health programming and support.

Taconic is an OMH level 2 facility.<sup>15</sup> This means that OMH staff are assigned to the facility on a full-time basis and can provide treatment to patients with a major mental disorder, but not conditions as acute as that of patients in level 1.<sup>16</sup> Fifty-three percent (53%, 18/34) of respondents at Taconic reported being on the OMH caseload.<sup>17</sup> This is higher than 38% (13/34) at Mohawk, which is also a level two facility. Twenty-six percent (26%, 6/23) of respondents at Taconic reported getting the mental health programs that they need. This is a lower share than 35% (8/23) at Mohawk.

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<sup>15</sup> Correctional facilities are classified as Mental Health Service Levels (1-6) depending on the amount of mental health services and resources available at the facility.

<sup>16</sup> These patients are transferred to Bedford Hills, which is a level 1 facility, for crisis admission.

<sup>17</sup> The OMH Monthly Facility Caseload Report for December 2023 showed that 62% (111/178) of the population at Taconic was on the OMH caseload. OMH. (Dec 2023). Monthly Facility Caseload Report.

Table 7. Mental Health

	Responses							
	YES		NO		N/A		TOTAL	
	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count
<b>General Population</b>								
Are you on the OMH caseload?	53%	18	47%	16			100%	34
Are you getting the mental health programs you need?	26%	6	35%	8	39%	9	100%	23
Have you attempted to hurt yourself in this prison?	4%	1	96%	26			100%	27

OMH reported that their staffing comprised of two social workers, a part-time psychiatrist, and part-time clerical position. They reported one social worker vacancy and explained they had been having difficulty recruiting for this position.

#### Lack of confidence in OMH services

While there was a range of responses to questions regarding mental healthcare services at Taconic, major themes included a lack of confidence in the system (8 individuals) and accessibility (7 individuals). Throughout the interviews, individuals commented that they “don’t talk to them [mental healthcare staff]” or “won’t bother with it [mental healthcare treatment].”

#### Desire for more mental health support and programming

There was also a desire among many respondents for more mental health support and OMH programming (9 individuals). For example, one respondent stated, “they don’t respond unless you say you’re going to kill yourself. They don’t get to the root of the problem, it’s a joke.” Four individuals also mentioned that people self-medicate for mental health issues. The IGRC and ILC also raised concerns that there were “not enough” mental health programs and supports at Taconic. IGRC and ILC members noted that incarcerated individuals rely on support through the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) resource centers,<sup>18</sup> but these programs are delivered via the phone, and incarcerated people felt it did not have the same impact.

## Programming and Recreation

**8** Respondents reported an overall lack of, and poor-quality programming including a need to update outdated vocational and

<sup>18</sup> The federal Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 (PREA) established national standards to prevent and respond to sexual violence in prisons, jails, and detention centers. Several Rape Crisis Programs serve DOCCS facilities, providing free, confidential services including: 24/7 emergency hotline and crisis intervention and support. WestCop provides these services to Taconic Correctional Facility. New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault. (n.d.) Prison Sexual Assault. NYCASA. <https://nyscasa.org/get-help/PREA/>

substance abuse programs and offer more reentry services. Respondents positively reviewed volunteer-led and higher education programs.

A lower share of respondents at Taconic, 54% (15/28), reported being able to enroll in the academic and vocational programs they needed compared to 88% (29/33) at Mohawk, 70% (44/63) at Albion, and 64% (29/45) at Fishkill. Many respondents who had previously been incarcerated at Albion and Bedford Hills reported fewer program offerings at Taconic.

Table 8. Programs

	Responses							
	YES		NO		N/A		TOTAL	
	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count
<b>General Population</b>								
Are you able to enroll in the academic and vocational programs you need?	54%	15	36%	10	11%	3	100%	28

CANY representatives conducted a walkthrough of Taconic’s academic and vocational program areas. They observed students in two computer labs, one designated for Bard College and the other for Hudson Link. Staff reported that students utilize these spaces for study groups and typing written assignments; students can submit a request (“callout”) to use the labs. CANY representatives spoke to a Hudson Link student who gave positive reviews of the college programming while citing that students wished the Hudson Link lab could have access to the intranet network like the Bard lab does. She also cited that they often resort to holding tutoring in the hallway or yard due to insufficient space in the computer lab. Another student, during an interview, stated that participating in the Bard College program was helping her cope with her incarceration.

CANY asked for clarification about why the assignment to Bard is full-time and paid and the assignment to Hudson Link is part-time and unpaid—a question raised by the incarcerated people CANY interviewed. The executive team explained that this is the arrangement the two college providers have with DOCCS but did not provide additional explanation.

Staff reported that Taconic’s general library receives many donated books; sometimes they bring a cart of overflow books to the housing units. Typically, the facility plans monthly and holiday reading themes; the book club was not running at the time of CANY’s visit. On the day of CANY’s visit, seven students were taking the HSE exam.

While observing the computer operator class, CANY representatives noticed students working through self-guided worksheets to learn PowerPoint and Excel software using outdated computers. Participants gave positive reviews of the class and cited their progress toward taking an exam for a computer specialist certification.

### **Lack of programming availability and variety**

In spite of the observations documented above, members of the ILC and IGRC raised concerns that there is little structure and lack of programming at Taconic. They reported that ORCs sometimes do not prioritize waitlisted individuals who need a particular program to qualify for their merit board. They also reported that the law library lacks word processing, so individuals cannot type documents for their attorneys; they asserted that the male facilities have access to word processing.<sup>19</sup> ILC and IGRC members emphasized the need for reentry programming and services. One individual remarked, “I leave in 13 days, and they’ve done nothing for me.” Members expressed a desire for assistance finding employment and housing, support in preparing for parole board hearings, and connections to outpatient treatment and MAT referrals. They questioned whether selection for the reentry program was in fact based on county of return as it at times appeared random.

Many respondents expressed concerns about program availability and quality at Taconic, citing their dissatisfaction with programs and the facility’s failure to meet programming needs (29 instances). A few respondents cited the two vocational programs operating at the time of the visit and conveyed frustration that “there’s nothing else here.” Some respondents reported that Taconic lacks adequate staffing to run programs (4 instances), citing cosmetology and ASAT instructor vacancies and asserting that there are not enough security staff to run recreation. The executive team reported that the cosmetology instructor position had been vacant for over a year as of the date of CANY’s visit. While Taconic stands out among many DOCCS facilities for being fully staffed with corrections officers, the executive team reported that 20 were out on leave at the time of CANY’s visit. Other respondents mentioned that incarcerated people experience idle time and under-stimulation. The executive team reported that they submitted a capital project request for a new program building that would mitigate current space constraints, however, it had yet to be approved.

### **Dissatisfaction with programs and failure to meet programming needs**

Many respondents reported not receiving what they needed out of programs, including one individual who stated, there is “no correction, no rehabilitation.” Several respondents reported poor quality of programming including a lack of substantive material discussed in ASAT and outdated vocational programs. For example, respondents expressed a desire for vocational programs that are more closely aligned with job prospects in the community, rather than learning computer software skills from outdated books. This sentiment mirrored CANY representatives’ observations of the computer operator class, in which students worked on self-guided worksheets and did not seem to interact extensively with the instructor.

Some incarcerated people expressed a desire for more programs (20 instances), including vocational and academic programming (4 instances), mental health and substance abuse programming (8 instances), and reentry services (2 instances).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> ILC and IGRC members also mentioned that the law library has no internet and only allows research on a secure network.

<sup>20</sup> Two interview respondents expressed a desire for more reentry services. Members of the IGRC and ILC also raised this issue as noted in page 20.

### Adequate and positive experiences of programming

A lower share of respondents cited positive experiences with programming (3 instances), reporting satisfaction with the college education they are receiving through Bard and Hudson Link programs, and adequate experiences with other programs (4 instances).

## Staff-Incarcerated Individual Interactions

**9** Some incarcerated individuals reported mixed experiences with staff, others reported abuse of authority, lack of accountability, and poor and dehumanizing treatment by staff.

Nearly half, 48% (15/31), of the respondents at Taconic reported having seen or experienced verbal, physical, or sexual abuse by staff. This is lower compared to 61% (28/46) at Fishkill and 55% (17/31) at Mohawk.<sup>21</sup> A lower share of respondents 30% (8/27), reported having seen or experienced racialized abuse by staff compared to 52% (15/19) at Mohawk, 46% (21/46) at Fishkill, and 43% (26/60) at Albion.

Table 9. Staff-Incarcerated People Interactions

	Responses					
	YES		NO		TOTAL	
	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count
<b>General Population</b>						
Have you seen or experienced <b>verbal, physical, or sexual</b> abuse by staff at this prison?	48%	15	52%	16	100%	31
Have you seen or experienced <b>racialized</b> abuse by staff at this prison?	30%	8	70%	19	100%	27

### Adequate and mixed experiences with staff

Many respondents reported adequate experience with staff (14 instances). Some described being treated better at Taconic compared to Bedford Hills and Albion. Respondents also reported mixed experiences with staff (16 instances), mostly asserting that some officers treat them well while others do not.

- ▶ “Surprisingly, [the staff have treated me] pretty well. Albion and Bedford were horrible.”
- ▶ “I think this is a pretty good facility. They do more for you than Albion or Bedford. The officers know you better and are really helpful.”

<sup>21</sup> CANY asked incarcerated people at Albion two different questions: (1), “Have you seen or been personally subjected to verbal or physical abuse by staff at this prison?” And (2), “Have you seen or been personally subject to sexual abuse or sexual harassment by staff at this prison?” Fifty percent, (50%, 32/64), of the respondents in general population units reported having seen or been personally subjected to verbal or physical abuse by staff at Albion, and 26%, (17/66) of the respondents reported having seen or been personally subject to sexual abuse or sexual harassment by staff.



- ▶ [It's a] "hit and miss." [Some CO's are decent, some are] "assholes" [who] "go above and beyond to make your stay miserable."
- ▶ "There's a 50/50 split. Some are great. Others are just here to hang out."

### Negative experiences with staff

Many respondents (50%, 20/40) reported poor treatment by staff, including abuse of authority or dehumanizing treatment (35 instances). Multiple people reported that staff do not apply policies consistently (9 instances). For example, one respondent alleged that, during the visitor screening process, staff harassed some people's families because of their clothes while allowing other, similarly dressed visitors to enter the facility without incident. Other respondents alleged that security staff regularly fabricate misbehavior reports. For respondents, this kind of misconduct and the inconsistent application of policies pointed to a general lack of staff accountability (7 instances). According to many respondents, staff can abuse them with impunity and are not being held accountable. Some incarcerated individuals stated, as a result, that they do not complain because they fear retaliation (8 instances).

- ▶ "[B]ody cameras only work for them [staff] - they are not on when staff are degrading us."
- ▶ "[O]fficers have a sort of list of individuals that they target for physical abuse - you can end up there by annoying an officer."
- ▶ "They [the staff] don't care here."

CANY received one allegation in which the interview respondent described being moved into a cell with a window that did not close as a form of retaliation.

## Grievances

**10** Overall, incarcerated people at Taconic expressed a lack of confidence in the grievance process.

Just over a quarter, 26% (5/19), of the respondents at Taconic believed the grievance process to be fair. This rate is similar to 25% (10/40) at Albion, and higher compared to 20% (4/40) at Fishkill and 17% (2/12) at Mohawk. Of those respondents at Taconic who had filed a grievance, 69% (9/13) felt their grievance had been resolved. Mistrust of the grievance process is a common theme CANY representatives hear across facilities.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> To better understand the concerns CANY has documented about the grievance system from many monitoring visits, CANY administered a system-wide survey to 10% of the prison population in September 2022. CANY collected responses through March 2023. Correctional Association of New York. (October 2023). "Smoke Screen": Experiences with the Incarcerated Grievance Program in New York State Prisons. [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/62f1552c1dd65741c53bbcf8/t/651ec66e5505c5122ed0154a/1696515700783/CANY\\_GrievanceReport\\_2023Oct.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/62f1552c1dd65741c53bbcf8/t/651ec66e5505c5122ed0154a/1696515700783/CANY_GrievanceReport_2023Oct.pdf)

Table 10. Grievances

Questions	Responses					
	YES		NO		TOTAL	
	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count
Have you filed a grievance at this prison?	45%	15	55%	18	100%	33
If yes, has your grievance been resolved?	69%	9	31%	4	100%	13
Is the grievance process fair?	26%	5	74%	14	100%	19

	2 DAYS		1 WEEK		2 WEEKS		1 MONTH		>1 MONTH		NO RESPONSE		TOTAL	
	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count
If you filed a grievance at this prison, how long did it take to get a response?	56%	9	19%	3	0%	0	0%	0	6%	1	19%	3	100%	16

Data from the DOCCS grievance program semi-annual report, covering January through June 2023,<sup>23</sup> showed that incarcerated people filed 12,639 grievances statewide. Out of 3,852 grievances filed in medium-security facilities, only 18 were logged at Taconic. The grievances filed at Taconic during this period were related to Program Services (n=2), Health Services (n=8), Facility Operations (n=6), and Executive Direction (n=2).

### Dissatisfaction with the Grievance Process

Respondents at Taconic reported several problems with the grievance system, including perceptions of bias or dysfunction (10 instances) and of long wait times for resolution, if at all (5 instances). Six respondents reported that they do not see the value in filing grievances, given the adverse consequences—retaliation or the fear of retaliation (7 instances).

- ▶ “[G]rievance is full of shit.”
- ▶ “There is no chain of command and there is retaliation after filing a grievance.”
- ▶ “[We are] scared of retaliation.”

Fewer respondents cited adequate experience with the grievance system (4 individuals).

23 NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision. (2023). Incarcerated Grievance Program Semi-Annual Report 2023. [https://doccs.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2023/12/incarcerated-grievance-program-semi-annual-report-jan-jun-2023\\_final.pdf](https://doccs.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2023/12/incarcerated-grievance-program-semi-annual-report-jan-jun-2023_final.pdf)

## Discipline

### 11 Overall, incarcerated people perceived the disciplinary process at Taconic to be unfair and biased.

Forty-six percent (46%, 13/28) of respondents reported having been subjected to discipline at Taconic. Compared to other medium-security facilities, a higher share of respondents in general population units at Taconic described the disciplinary process as fair. Fifty percent (50%, 8/16) of respondents described the disciplinary process as fair compared to 32% (7/29) at Fishkill, 19% (7/44) at Albion, and 10% (2/22) at Mohawk.

Table 11. Discipline

Questions	Responses					
	YES		NO		TOTAL	
	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count
Have you been subject to discipline at this prison?	46%	13	54%	15	100%	28
Is the disciplinary system fair?	50%	8	50%	8	100%	16

#### Perception of unfair and biased disciplinary process

Several respondents reported an unfair and biased disciplinary process at Taconic (15 instances), including concerns of discretionary use of surveillance technology (7 instances). They alleged that staff determine, in a biased manner, which footage to produce and which not to produce, and there is no way for them to challenge the decision. Respondents also communicated that staff impose arbitrary disciplinary measures (6 instances). Respondents also reported experiencing loss of access to services and programming as a disciplinary measure (13 instances).

- ▶ “[T]he microphones in Taconic don’t work so they can slay us with what they write on the tickets, and it stays on our record.”
- ▶ “[I got] 30 days loss of rec – no commissary, no rec, no programs, no phone. I think they gave too many days.”
- ▶ “In one case, a CO beat a transgender person and took his camera off to avoid recording.”

A small number of respondents reported positive experience with discipline (3 instances). They said that the disciplinary process was fair. One individual acknowledged that “I got less [punishment] than they could have given me.”

## Material Conditions and Environmental Issues

**12** The safety of Taconic’s drinking water was a prevalent environmental concern among respondents. Additionally, when asked about the adequacy of Taconic’s temperature controls, many respondents described experiencing extreme temperatures in the facility.

At Taconic, most respondents (67%, 16/24), reported having access to clean water outside the commissary. This share is lower compared with Fishkill (84%, 26/43) and higher compared with Mohawk (58%, 15/26).<sup>24</sup> Additionally, most respondents at Taconic (52%, 14/27) reported that the facility had adequate temperature controls for each season, positioning Taconic at the middle of the comparative sample’s distribution—58% (15/26) of respondents at Mohawk and 11% (5/44) of respondents at Fishkill reported that their respective prisons have adequate, seasonally appropriate temperature controls.<sup>25</sup>

Table 12. Material Conditions and Environmental Issues

Questions	Responses					
	YES		NO		TOTAL	
	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count
Do you have access to clean drinking water outside of the commissary?	67%	16	33%	8	100%	24
Does this prison have adequate temperature controls for each season?	52%	14	48%	13	100%	27

Although the closed-ended responses suggest that incarcerated people at Taconic have access to clean drinking water, most respondents expressed concerns about the facility’s water in their interviews.<sup>26</sup> In total, 45% (18/40) of incarcerated people interviewed at Taconic expanded on water-related concerns when discussing the prison’s material and environmental conditions. Respondents questioned the safety of the drinking water and noted the inconsistent availability of hot water for showers.

### Concerns regarding the safety of drinking water

Most respondents who touched on material and environmental conditions in their interviews distrusted the drinking water at Taconic. Fifteen respondents reported that their drinking water is either dirty, full of chemicals, or tastes “like trash.” Two of these respondents recounted feeling sick after drinking the water; another three suspected that it contains lead. Notably, one respondent drew a parallel between

<sup>24</sup> CANY asked incarcerated people at Albion a different question: “Do you have access to clean water?” Eighty-three percent (83%, 49/59) of respondents at Albion answered “Yes, I have access to clean water.”

<sup>25</sup> CANY (Personal communication, 2022) asked incarcerated people at Albion two questions about temperature: (1) “During the winter, do you have adequate heat inside?” and (2) “During summer, is it adequately cool inside?” Fifty-two percent (52%, 28/54) of respondents reported having adequate heat in the winter and 17% (10/59) reported having adequate temperature controls in the summer.

<sup>26</sup> Additionally, two people who responded, “Yes, I have access to clean drinking water outside of the commissary” qualified their responses. One respondent clarified that she prefers to drink bottled water. Another respondent said that the facility needs filters for its water. (Correctional Association of New York, Personal Communication, 2024)

Taconic’s water and its proximity to the asphalt factory, highlighting that both are environmental factors that negatively impact her health (see pages 16-17).<sup>27</sup>

More than half of the respondents who described problems with the prison’s drinking water (53%, 8/15) attributed these issues to a recent change in Taconic’s water source: “They just switched our water over and now the water crystalizes after sitting.” This explanation, and respondents’ concerns about the drinking water more generally, echo the reports of contaminated water made by incarcerated people at Taconic and Bedford Hills after Hurricane Ida hit the region in 2021.<sup>28</sup> This parallel implies that the trustworthiness of Taconic’s drinking water is a long-standing issue.<sup>29</sup>

### **Recent loss of hot water and inconsistencies in water temperature**

Respondents brought up other water-related issues in their interviews. Seven respondents housed across three buildings—building 93, building 84, and building 81—reported having no hot water at the time of CANY’s visit or for a period preceding the visit. One respondent pointed out that there had been no heat or hot water in the facility for the prior two weeks. According to the same respondent, the issue was partially resolved the day before CANY’s visit. She stated that, although heat was restored, the temperature controls for the showers in her unit, unit G, were unreliable: two showers had no hot water while one shower had only hot water.

### **Extreme temperatures**

The responses to CANY’s close-ended question on the adequacy of Taconic’s temperature controls are relatively split: 14 people found them to be adequate and 13 people found them to be inadequate. Respondents’ comments on this issue provide additional context: 24 respondents elaborated on the facility’s heating and cooling controls in their interviews. Seven of these respondents indicated that the temperature controls were satisfactory. The rest of the respondents found the facility’s temperature controls to be unsatisfactory. These respondents explained that inside temperatures are extreme in the summer and winter months (12 instances), that a radiator had recently malfunctioned (4 instances), and that, generally, the official response to extreme temperatures is untimely or inconsistent (4 instances).

DOCCS’s response to extreme temperatures came up in CANY’s meeting with the ILC and IGRC and interviews with incarcerated people. Members of the ILC and IGRC and two interview respondents noted that facility administrators distributed fans in late autumn once it was no longer hot outside.<sup>30</sup> Another interview respondent stated that the fans would make the following summer more bearable.

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27 Another three respondents characterized Taconic’s proximity to the asphalt factor as an environmental health hazard.

28 Adams, C. (2021, September 15). Women in New York prisons complain of contaminated water after Hurricane Ida. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/women-new-york-prisons-complain-contaminated-water-hurricane-ida-rcna2020>

29 In April 2024, DOCCS published drinking water quality reports on its website. NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision. (2022). New York City Drinking Water Supply and Quality Report 2022. NYC Environmental Protection. [nyc-20.23.234.23411-drinking-water-supply-report-2022\\_2.pdf](https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/2022-23-drinking-water-supply-report-2022_2.pdf).

30 The Interfaith Prison Partnership donated the fans to Taconic in September 2023.

## Conclusion

CANY extends appreciation to the executive team and staff of the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, NYS Office of Mental Health, and incarcerated individuals for their knowledge and assistance in supporting our monitoring visit to Taconic. This report was provided to DOCCS and OMH for a 60-day review period prior to publishing it to provide both agencies with an opportunity to respond. Following this review period, both the report and any responses are published together.

CANY's oversight activities encompass in-person visits to state correctional facilities, surveys of incarcerated individuals, data analysis of administrative records, and confidential communication with incarcerated individuals through letters and phone calls. Based on its findings, CANY issues [policy recommendations](#) to the legislature and the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS). These recommendations and other [CANY reports](#) are publicly available on the CANY website.

To view other post-visit briefs, please visit CANY's [reports page](#).

## Appendix A: Methodology

Throughout the visit, CANY representatives conducted one-on-one structured interviews with 40 incarcerated individuals and held semi-structured informational meetings with (1) incarcerated individuals serving on various committees, (2) the facility’s executive team, (3) medical staff, and (4) mental health staff. To supplement the information gathered through these interviews, CANY representatives recorded notes ad hoc as they walked through housing units, medical, academic and vocational programming areas. The sections below contain additional details about CANY’s interview methods.

### One-on-One Interviews

CANY representatives interviewed 40 incarcerated individuals in general population housing. One protocol was used to guide these interviews: a 28-question protocol for people in general population housing units. The questions in the general population protocol are organized into five (5) topic areas: (1) medical and dental services, (2) mental health services, (3) programs and work, (4) treatment, grievances, and discipline, and (5) conditions at Taconic, which includes questions about the provision of environmental conditions as well as basic services and entitlements (e.g., commissary, access to clean water, access to phones, etc.). The first and last questions on the protocol form are open-ended. The inclusion of these questions makes it possible for incarcerated people to discuss experiences and/or concerns that might not have come up otherwise.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, all protocols clarify that participation is voluntary and that respondents do not have to answer every question.<sup>32</sup> CANY representatives transcribed their interview notes in the week following the visit. Once the interview data was transcribed, CANY staff tabulated responses to closed-ended questions. To gauge whether the people’s responses at Taconic mirror those at other medium-security prisons, CANY compares closed-ended responses collected on this visit to those collected on visits to other medium-security prisons conducted between June 2022 and October 2023, including Albion, Fishkill, and Mohawk.<sup>33</sup>

To identify prevalent themes, the open-ended interview data is coded using a combination of “top-down” and “bottom-up” approaches. Staff begin coding the data using a predetermined set of codes based on the topics outlined in CANY’s protocol forms, which include questions about key services and entitlements, as well as CANY’s thematic analysis of past visit data. As staff conduct this initial round of coding, they keep notes to identify additional patterns that emerge from the interviews. Subsequently, staff re-code the data using the codes derived from the interviews. This report highlights (1) counts of how often a particular theme or sub-theme came up across all interviews, and (2) illustrative quotes.<sup>34</sup>

### Informational Meetings

<sup>31</sup> All interview protocols contain open-ended questions. Responses to these questions are captured by CANY representatives, who take notes during each interview. These notes typically include a combination of direct quotes and paraphrase.

<sup>32</sup> Due to incarcerated people’s preferences and the visit’s time constraints, CANY representatives may not ask all the questions in a particular protocol form. For these reasons, the total number people who responded to a particular question does not always match the total number of respondents interviewed in general population or SHU units.

<sup>33</sup> CANY visited Albion in June 2022, Fishkill in June 2023, and Mohawk in October 2023.

<sup>34</sup> A theme or sub-theme may come up repeatedly in a single interview, so the number of individuals who mention a particular issue does not always align with the number times that issue came up.

During the visit, CANY representatives held meetings with (1) Taconic’s executive team, (2) medical staff, (3) the ILC and the IGRC, and (4) OMH mental health staff.<sup>35</sup> These meetings followed semi-structured interview guides, with questions tailored to each stakeholder group.

CANY representatives held two meetings with the executive team: an informational meeting at the start of the visit and a virtual debrief meeting following the monitoring visit. At the debrief meeting, CANY representatives outlined and asked questions about their initial impressions of conditions at Taconic. The issues CANY representatives raised at this meeting were issues that appeared to come up repeatedly during the visit or to be especially urgent and concerning, regardless of their prevalence. For a high-level summary of these issues see the “Impressions from Visit” section of this report.

Following the visit, CANY representatives transcribed their notes from the informational meetings. CANY staff reviewed meeting notes to gain a better understanding of the institution’s policies, procedures, and practices, and major initiatives underway (e.g., capital projects). CANY staff reviewed the debrief meeting notes as they analyzed interview data to (1) assess the prevalence of and/or (2) further illuminate the issues raised to the executive team.

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35 CANY met with OMH staff virtually on December 11, 2023.



## Appendix B: Snapshot of Demographic Data

Population Demographics as of December 1, 2023 | Taconic Correctional Facility

Systemwide Female Population

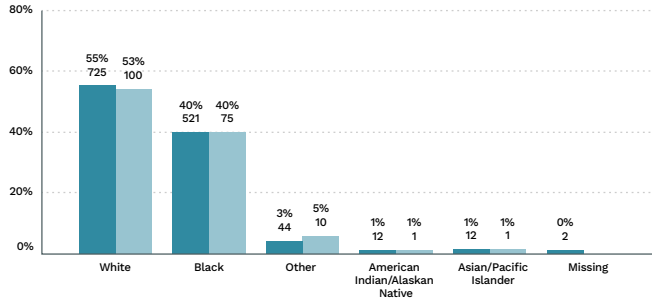
Taconic

1316

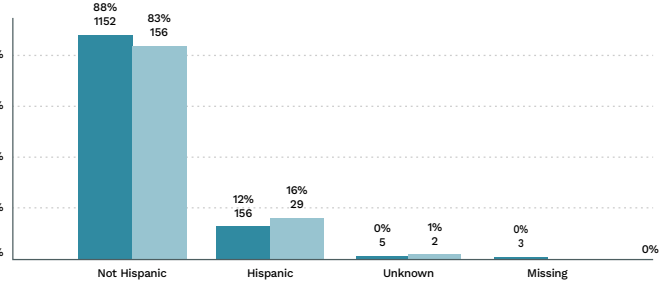
187

● Systemwide Female Population ● Taconic

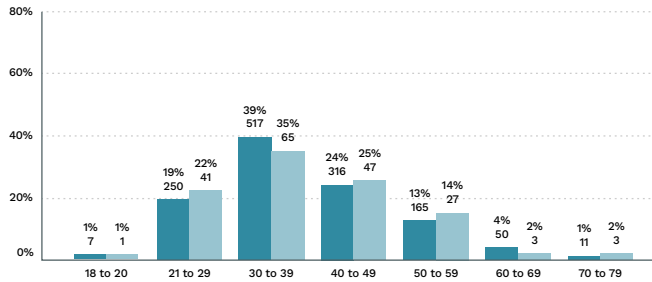
**Distribution by Race**



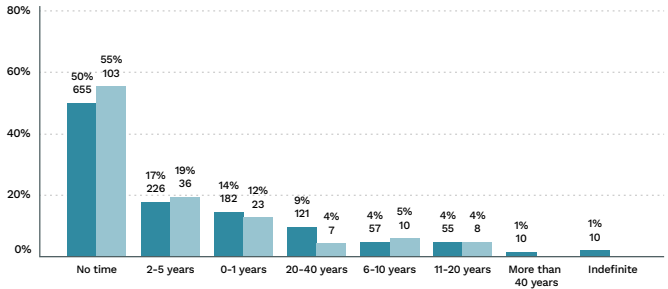
**Distribution by Ethnicity**



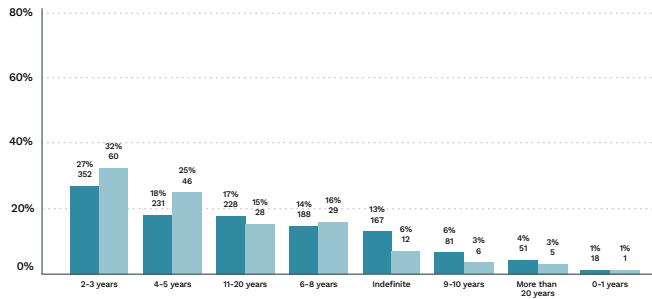
**Distribution by Age**



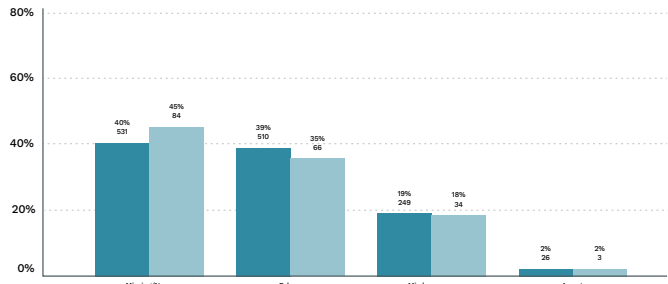
**Distribution by Minimum Sentence**



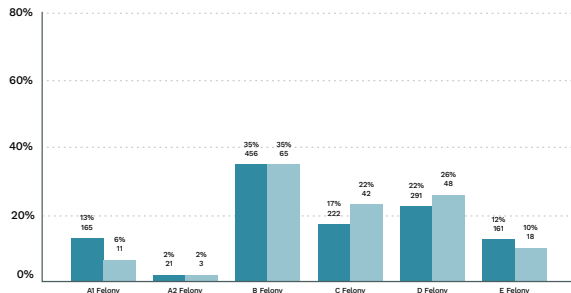
**Distribution by Maximum Sentence**



**Distribution by Most Serious Prior Offense**

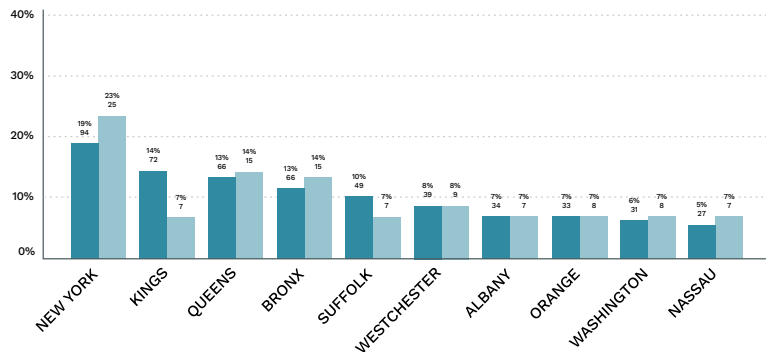


**Distribution by Crime Class**



**Distribution by Commitment County (Most Serious Offense)**

*Includes Only Top 10 Commitment Counties Among Incarcerated People at Taconic*



Population Demographics as of December 1, 2023 | Taconic Correctional Facility

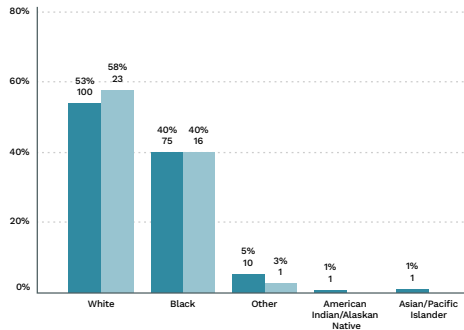
Taconic Population Interview Sample

Taconic Incarcerated People Interviewed by CANY (valid DINS only)

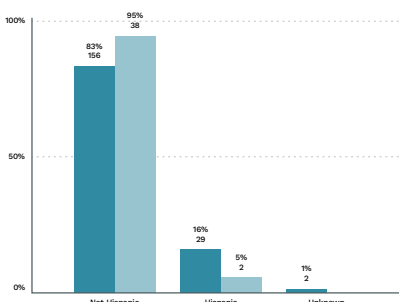
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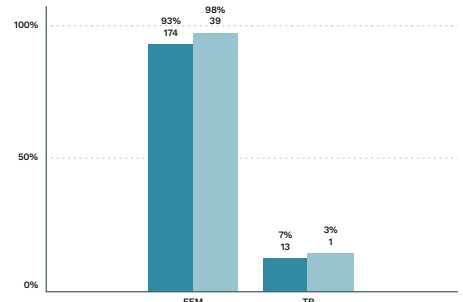
Distribution by Race



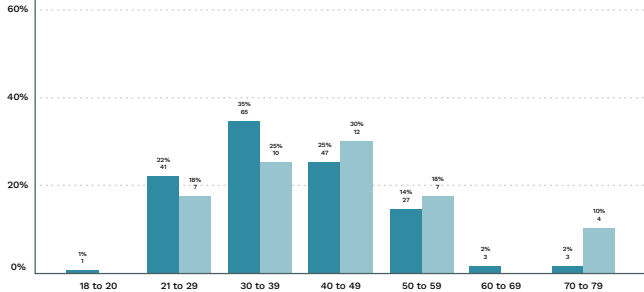
Distribution by Ethnicity



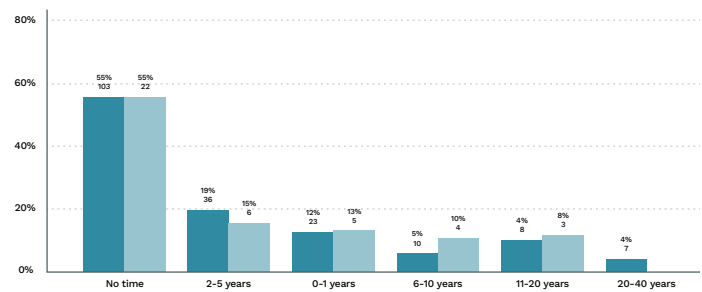
Distribution by Unit/Building Code



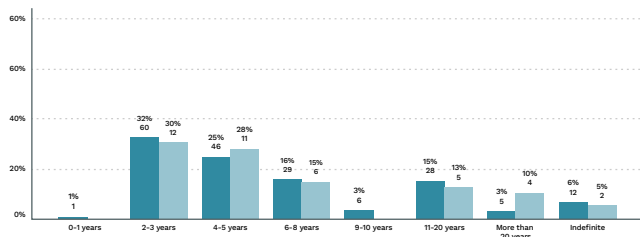
Distribution by Age



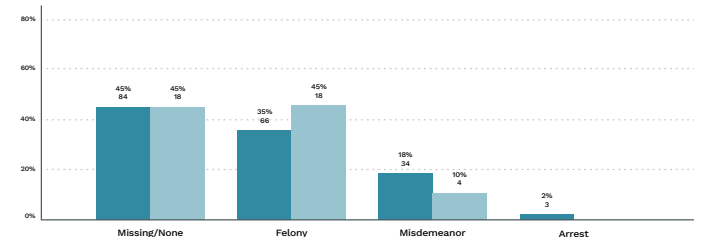
Distribution by Minimum Sentence



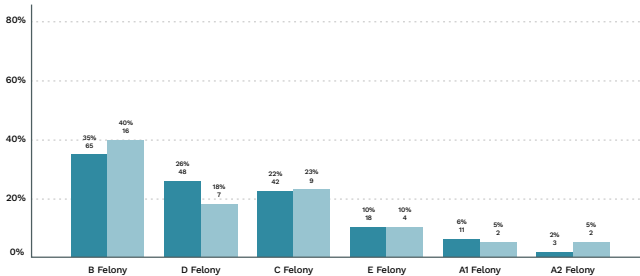
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Distribution by Most Serious Prior Offense

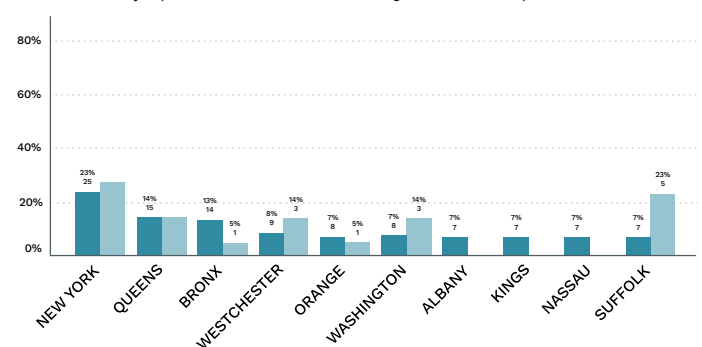


Distribution by Crime Class



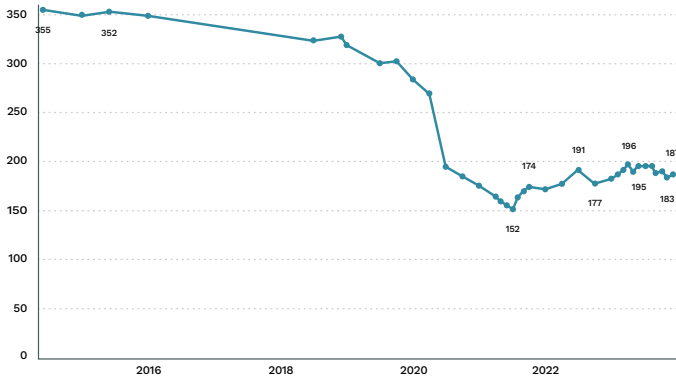
Distribution by Commitment County (Most Serious Offense)

Includes Only Top 10 Commitment Counties Among Incarcerated People at Taconic

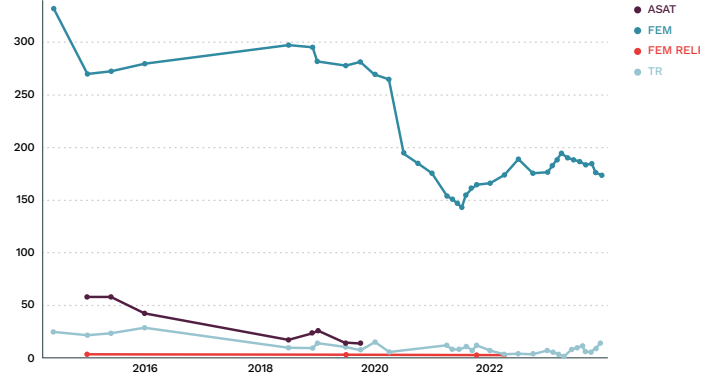


Population Demographics as of December 1, 2023 | Taconic Correctional Facility

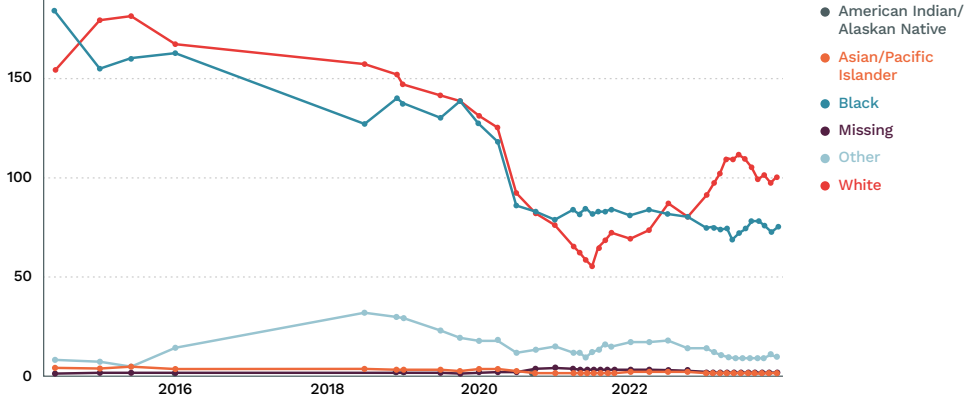
Facility Population Over Time



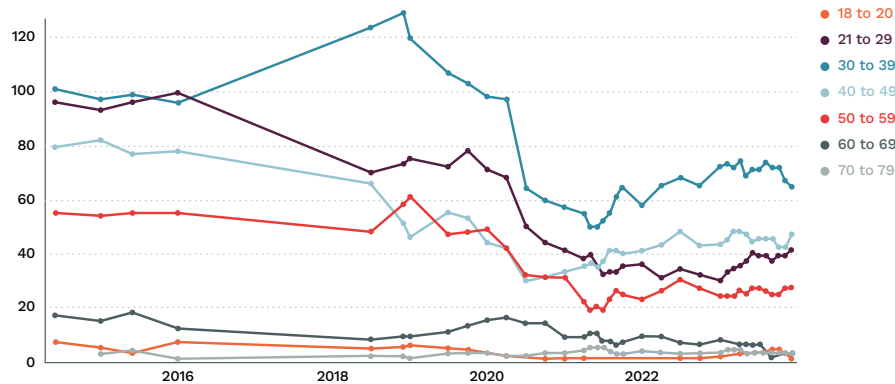
Facility Population Over Time by Unit



Facility Population Over Time by Race



Facility Population Over Time by Age Range



## Appendix C: Data Addendum

**Taconic General Population Quantitative Data Addendum**

Question	Yes	No	Total
If you have requested medical care, have you received a response?	20	4	24
	83%	17%	100%
If you have requested dental care, have you received a response?	12	4	16
	75%	25%	100%
Do you have unaddressed medical or dental needs?	16	7	23
	70%	30%	100%
Are you on the OMH caseload?	18	16	34
	53%	47%	100%
Have you attempted to hurt yourself in this prison?	1	26	27
	4%	96%	100%
Have you experienced or witnessed an emergency medical or mental health situation in this prison?	14	15	28
	48%	52%	100%
Have you seen or experienced verbal, physical, or sexual abuse by staff at this prison?	15	16	31
	48%	52%	100%
Have you seen or experienced racialized abuse (slurs, stereotyping, discrimination) by staff at this prison?	8	19	27
	30%	70%	100%
Have you filed a grievance at this prison?	15	18	33
	45%	55%	100%
If yes, has your grievance been resolved?	9	4	13
	69%	31%	100%
Is the grievance process fair?	5	14	19
	26%	74%	100%
Have you been subject to discipline at this prison?	13	15	28
	46%	54%	100%
Is the disciplinary system fair?	8	8	16
	50%	50%	100%

Question	Yes	No	Total
Is the commissary adequately stocked with items on a regular basis?	17	10	27
	63%	37%	100%
Are you able to access items from packages in a timely manner?	14	15	29
	48%	52%	100%
Are you receiving three meals per day in adequate portions?	27	3	30
	90%	10%	100%
Do you have access to clean drinking water outside of the commissary?	16	8	24
	67%	33%	100%
Does this prison have adequate temperature controls for each season (i.e., cooling in the summer, heat in the winter)?	14	13	27
	52%	48%	100%
Are you able to make phone calls, either by using the phones or through a tablet?	30	2	32
	94%	6%	100%
Do you have access to in-person visits?	31	3	34
	91%	9%	100%
Have you ever been locked inside your cell for more than 17 hours a day?	4	26	30
	13%	87%	100%

Question	Yes	No	N/A	Total
If you have received medical care, was the level of care adequate?	8	11	0	19
	42%	58%	0%	100%
If you received dental care, was the level of care adequate?	1	8	2	11
	9%	73%	18%	100%
Are you receiving medication as prescribed, including schedule and dosage?	16	6	3	26
	64%	24%	12%	100%

Question	Yes	No	N/A	Total
Are you getting the mental health programs you need?	6	8	9	23
	26%	35%	39%	100%
Are you able to enroll in the academic and vocational programs you need?	15	10	3	28
	54%	36%	11%	100%

Question	2 days	1 week	2 weeks	1 month	>1 month	Total
(MEDICAL) If no, how long has your request been outstanding?	0	0	1	0	1	3
	0%	0%	50%	0%	50%	100%
(DENTAL) If no, how long has your request been outstanding?	1	0	0	0	1	2
	50%	0%	0%	0%	50%	100%
(MEDICAL) If yes, how long did it take to get care?	7	2	0	0	4	13
	54%	15%	0%	0%	31%	100%
(DENTAL) If yes, how long did it take to get care?	0	0	2	1	7	10
	0%	0%	20%	10%	70%	100%

Question	2 days	1 week	2 weeks	1 month	>1 month	No Response	Total
(GRIEVANCE) If yes, how long did it take to get a response?	9	3	0	0	1	3	16
	56%	19%	0%	0%	6%	19%	100%



KATHY HOCHUL  
Governor

## Corrections and Community Supervision

DANIEL F. MARTUSCELLO III  
Commissioner

The Correctional Association of New York (CANY) visited Taconic Correctional Facility on December 7<sup>th</sup> of 2023 and issued a draft report. The Department responds to the report as follows:

The New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) welcomes the feedback received regarding the operations of Taconic Correctional Facility. Taconic Correctional Facility is classified as a medium security correctional facility that consists of single cells, single rooms, multiple occupancy rooms, and dormitories. Taconic Correctional Facility also offers numerous programs consisting of academic education, vocational training, college programs, numerous treatment programs, as well as Mental Health Services.

### Programming

Taconic Correctional Facility is one example of the efforts being taken state-wide to provide life-changing academic, vocational, and rehabilitative programs, highlighting opportunities that are not often seen behind prison walls, which has made the Department a national leader in corrections. As noted in the report, Taconic Correctional Facility has a large academic and vocational staff who provide enhanced academic and vocational programming, as well as a diverse range of volunteer programs. The positive reports from those who were interviewed regarding the quality of programs at Taconic reinforces the success and importance of the programs being offered. The vast and comprehensive educational opportunities available to incarcerated individuals provide skills and/or competencies necessary to function successfully in a contemporary society. DOCCS is reimagining our educational programming by identifying curriculum, modalities, and scheduling strategies to further promote and ensure best practices in lesson development and classroom instruction. This includes education resources and instruction to assist students in earning a Pre-High School Equivalency and High School Equivalency, as well as College level credited courses offered by Bard College and through Hudson Link. At the time of the visit, there were 30 students enrolled. Bard maintains a computer lab for study groups and independent work.

While DOCCS requires participation in academic and vocational programs, preference is given to those closest to their earliest release date (ERD) to ensure they have completed all required programming prior to reaching an eligible release date. This system provides for broader access to the population. Staffing has had an impact on the enrollment to Alcohol and Substance Abuse Treatment (ASAT). To note, DOCCS recently implemented a Master Job Organization Table Analysis (MJOTA), which reviews the programming being offered at facilities to identify areas of particular interest or need for the incarcerated population. Taconic Correctional Facility offers the following programs:



- Substance Abuse Treatment Services (ASAT).
  - Moving On – gender specific cognitive behavior programming, which is included in the ASAT curriculum.
- Alternative SHOCK - In the event that an individual designated by court order for enrollment in the Shock Incarceration program requires a degree of medical care or mental health care that cannot be provided at a Shock Incarceration facility, the Department, provides an alternative placement that is equipped to manage their level of care.
- Aggression Replacement Training.
- Living Safely Without Violence – is a trauma informed aggression program. The program's overarching goal is to help individuals live safely, without violence, and the negative consequences it can bring. The curriculum emphasizes raising awareness of what contributes to violent behavior in others and oneself, identifies triggers which cause anger and stress, learn to manage intense emotions which cause a loss of control and the learning of new skills to appropriately handle emotions and relationships.
- Transitional services including - Orientation, Phase 1, Phase 3, Resource Center, and a Parole Board Prep Workshop.
- Relapse Prevention.
- Family Reunification Program.
- Your Money Your Goals – a 15-week program to address and build financial literacy.
- TAMAR (Trauma, Addiction, Mental Health, and Recovery) Cognitive behavior programming.
- Video Visitation.
- Women's Initiative Program - developed to help incarcerated women examine and consider creating new narratives for their lives that are based on self-esteem, boundaries, positive relationships, and spirituality.
  - Self-Care Workshops - addresses mind, body, and wellness and have been incorporated into the Women's Initiative Program. The intent is to highlight the importance of taking care of oneself while incarcerated and upon release. Workshops include, self-advocacy and women's health, spirituality, fitness, healthy and mindfulness eating, shopping tips with a focus on nutrition, hair care, skin care, and dressing for success on a limited budget.
- Vocational programming including painting, computer operations, and cosmetology programs.

Additionally, below is a list of the programs that volunteers are involved in at Taconic Correctional Facility:

- Alcoholics Anonymous.
- Alternatives to Violence Program.
- CARE - a program administered by the Women's' Prison Association (WPA) that provides education and testing for AIDS and HIV.
- Endeavor Horsemanship - an Equine-Assisted Growth and Learning program, working with trauma-informed people. Through a series of therapeutic groups sessions, the program looks to utilize the animals to heal trauma.



- Expressive Arts-Bilingual (Spanish/English) program designed for women and gender expansive people to create a safe and creative space for participants to express themselves visually and in writing.
- Gardening – a class from Bard College offered during the Spring Semester that involves the growing and care of actual plants, fruits, and vegetables.
- Hour Children – an organization that providing services to strengthen family ties and provide services for incarcerated mothers. Their services include:
  - Advocacy - volunteers assist mothers with staying in contact with their children and teachers.
  - Parenting - a group setting that addresses communicating with and understanding issues that impact children with incarcerated parents.
  - Birthdays – arranges for cake and gifts for the visiting children on their birthdays.
  - Childrens' Center - provides games and crafts for children visiting their parents.
  - Re-Entry Community Based Organizations – presents transitional housing/community resources to the Re-Entry program participants.
  - Lawyers – attorneys come to discuss legal issues concerning family and custody.
  - Card Shop- opportunities to make cards for their children and send them home to them, sometimes with a children's' book.
  - Children of Incarcerated Parents Program (CHIPP) – children in foster care are brought to the facility for visits with their mothers.
  - Housing – screening for placement in an Hour Children facility, upon release.
- How Mommy Found Her Way Home – a workshop series that promotes the reconnection between incarcerated mothers and their children.
- Just Detention International (JDI) - workshop therapy that focuses on sexual victimization.
- Religious studies and services.
- Re-entry Works – a program contracted with the Osborne Association to provide transitional services for soon to be released incarcerated individuals.
- Rehabilitation Through the Arts (RTA)
- Transgender Support Group - a peer support group that centers on incarcerated individuals who identify as Transgender and Gender Diverse (TGD) inclusive of those who identify as Nonbinary and Gender Nonconforming, and those who are exploring their gender identity and expression.
- WestCop Domestic Violence - provides an educational, safe, nonjudgmental therapeutic space for participants to learn about Domestic Violence.
- Write to Heal - empowers women in correctional settings to write and share their own stories.
- Yoga.

Regarding the Re-entry Program, incarcerated individuals at Taconic Correctional Facility qualify for participation when they are 90-days from reaching their Earliest Release Date (ERD). Individuals who are being released to New York City, Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester, or Rockland Counties are placed in the program. This includes regular contact with individuals and organizations from their returning communities, who assist them in making a successful transition upon release.



Notwithstanding, all incarcerated individuals are assigned an Offender Rehabilitation Coordinator (ORC) who works directly with them to identify resources and collaborate on comprehensive release planning. This includes exploring referrals for housing, substance abuse prevention services, anger management, domestic violence and mental health counseling, medical services, mentoring, and employment.

Taconic Correctional Facility recently opened a Re-entry computer lab for incarcerated individuals to access various Re-entry websites such as the Department of Labor, the Human Resources Administration, and the State University of New York through limited secure internet. If additional resources become available from the localities, DOCCS is committed to working with our community partners to provide support and planning for communities outside of New York City.

Newly implemented re-entry preparation initiatives include:

- Non-Drivers ID application process - In collaboration with the Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) eligible individuals are provided the opportunity to apply for a non-driver's ID.
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and CASH Assistance - In partnership with the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA), New York City residents may apply for benefits thirty days prior to their release. Approved individuals are issued a benefit card post release. Residents returning to New York City may apply.
- Edgecombe Transitional Housing referral process - designed to provide undomiciled releasees returning to New York City with temporary housing and an opportunity to obtain permanent housing. Residents are assisted in their efforts to reintegrate back to their families, work, and community while maintaining personal safety in a clean and orderly environment. A wide variety of individualized services are provided by the Odyssey House and other New York City community providers.
- Jails to Jobs - DOCCS is enhancing career development and job search opportunities in a variety of ways including matching the individuals experience and skills with hiring employers as they prepare to return home. In collaboration with the Department of Labor, a referral process is currently under development to establish linkages with reentry specialists prior to release. Individuals will be afforded the opportunity to receive individualized job search assistance pre and post release.

Regarding word processing resources, Taconic Correctional Facility Law Library Program provides basic resources for legal research and preparation of legal papers on thin clients and typewriters that are available for use by the population. Legal assistance services are available to incarcerated individuals who are unable to do their own legal work. Incarcerated individuals who are law clerks and have been certified through a department-sponsored legal research course, either provide these legal assistance services or refer individuals to free legal service organizations in the community. Individuals with verifiable court deadlines may obtain special access to the Law Library, upon request.

Regarding the cosmetology program, this course covers the care of hair, skin, and nails, and provides instruction in the skills of hair shaping, coloring, thermal curling, straightening, and styling of hair. The goal of this course is to provide students with entry level skills as a hairdresser, beautician, or



manicurist, and to prepare them to take the Cosmetology licensing exam. Participants can earn a Cosmetology license and receive a supply kit upon their release. Taconic Correctional Facility has been canvassing for qualified candidates and has recently identified two instructors. The anticipated start is September 2024.

#### Basic Provisions of Services

Commissary - Commissary is a privilege that provides incarcerated individuals with the opportunity to purchase personal food items, clothing, and other provisions to maintain cleanliness, health, and morale. Commissary vendors are selected via a competitive bid process in compliance with New York State Finance Law. All food items are sold at cost. In accordance with contracting requirements, as our staff are notified of instances where items are currently out of stock or no longer available, alternative vendors are sought for the specific items effected.

Additionally, the business office staff at Taconic Correctional Facility has been working with the Incarcerated Individual Liaison Committee (ILC) to identify which items should be replaced on the current item roster. The ILC takes suggestions from the entire population on new items to be considered for approval by the facility Superintendent.

Packages - Directive #4911, "Packages & Articles Sent to Facilities", outlines procedures for processing, issuing, having item discrepancies reviewed and returning packages, as well as a listing of allowable items that can be received by incarcerated individuals through the package room. The Taconic Correctional Facility package room has consistent staff coverage. All packages received with approved items are processed and distributed in a timely fashion.

All unauthorized items are appropriately documented and returned. It should be noted that the cosmetology program offers cosmetology training and services to the population, not actual cosmetics. Recent changes to Directive #4911 now allow additional cosmetic items for the population. Any problems with the packages are referred to the appropriate vendor. Incarcerated individuals are encouraged to file a claim for any item(s) declared missing/damaged in accordance with Directive #2733, "Incarcerated Individual Personal Property Claim". Claims are then investigated per Department policy and the incarcerated individual is notified of the determination. In addition to filing a grievance, incarcerated individuals can lodge complaints to the area Sergeant. Any allegation of staff misconduct is thoroughly investigated upon receipt. However, without specific details, the allegations of packages not being handled in accordance with Directive #4911, cannot be investigated. DOCCS requests CANY to encourage the incarcerated individuals to utilize the well-established processes in place to address their concerns during their visits to our correctional facilities.

#### Nutrition

DOCCS strives to provide a variety of foods on all available menus and takes into consideration visual appeal, nutritional requirements, preference, and religious requirements. Nutritional Services constantly monitors concerns of food quality and overall acceptance in our facilities. Food is randomly sampled monthly at the Office of Nutritional Services to ensure quality and consistency including a



review of the Food Service Questionnaire Quarterly Report (Form 1545). This is a starting point in which Nutritional Services tests and improves products or works on introducing new ones. Additionally, the entire DOCCS menu is created within the Nutritional Service office and approved by a Registered Dietician to ensure proper portion sizes and nutritional values are met. The nutritional values and portions are adequate for healthy adult individuals. All ready-to-eat (RTE) and meat products produced at the Food Production Center (FPC) are done under the review of a USDA inspector to ensure food safety and wholesomeness.

Special menus are created to address medical, allergic, and religious requirements. Religious meal participation is handled pursuant to Directive #4202 "Religious Programs and Practices" and the DOCCS Religious Menu, which is published annually. Special dietary meals, religious meals, holiday meals, organization sponsored meals and special event meals all contribute to the unique variety of meals available.

Members of the ILC are polled quarterly on menu items they like; menu items they do not like and can even offer menu items they would like instead. This quarterly report is also filled out by the Food Service Administrator, and Superintendent. Once signed by all parties, it is forwarded to Correctional Food Nutritional Services Director and then to the FPC. This process allows the population to share items they prefer, items they do not prefer, and items they would like to add to the menu. For example, levels of soy, though deemed healthy and appropriate in nutritional analysis by the Registered Dietitian at Nutritional Services, has been reduced in many Cook Chill products in response to the concerns of the incarcerated population. Regarding meat in FPC products not being real, on a quarterly basis, the FPC purchases an average of the following amounts of meat:

- 62,000 lbs. Fresh Beef Top Round
- 78,280 lbs. Fresh Chicken Thigh, boneless
- 46,000 lbs. Fresh Turkey Thigh, boneless
- 120,000 lbs. Cold Cuts

Regarding portion sizes, staff serve meals in accordance with the DOCCS Nutritional Services Portion Chart. These portion sizes are used to determine the daily nutritional analysis, which averages 2800 calories and 90 grams of protein per day. Site visits to Taconic Correctional Facility are conducted by the DOCCS Food Service Regional staff on a quarterly basis at minimum. No deficiencies of food being held or served out of temperature have been reported. Nor have issues of this nature been reported by the County Health Dept. during their inspections. Taconic Correctional Facility reports their heating and hot-holding equipment as operational.

#### Phone Calls and Tablets

DOCCS appreciates the acknowledgement from the incarcerated individuals regarding their access and ability to contact members of the community through phone calls and messaging. Incarcerated individuals have access to telephones and tablets in accordance with Directive #4423, "Incarcerated Individual Telephones" and Directive #4425, "Incarcerated Individual Tablet Program".



The Department recognizes the importance of the population being able to communicate with family and friends at reasonable rates. Accordingly, the Department has recently extended our current incarcerated phone contract and renegotiated the rates associated with the phone program. This process has reduced the total cost per minute for a domestic call from \$.0399 per minute to \$.035 per minute and provides each incarcerated individual with two free 15-minute calls per week. The Department will continue to seek reducing these costs as new contracts are procured. Additionally, the Department has entered a new tablet contract that has resulted in additional cost reductions. This includes reducing the price of a single stamp from \$.20 per stamp to \$.15 per stamp for single purchases, with stamp bundles being similarly reduced from \$.15 to \$.12 per stamp, for a bundle of 100 stamps. Each incarcerated individual with access to a general confinement tablet and kiosk now receives eight free stamps per month to use for secure messaging. The Department has successfully negotiated up to 15,000 free stamps annually that are allocated equitably to college prison programs and other educational providers. This allows educational providers to send and receive secure messages at no cost. A new reduced-price fee structure for online/phone money transfers has been negotiated for each amount category. Of course, there continues to be no cost for depositing funds via the conventional visitor deposit lockbox located at each correctional facility or by money order/personal check mailed to the JPay lockbox address.

The Department has successfully negotiated the deployment of Wi-Fi technology that allows for the installation of a phone application on all general population tablets, as well as the ability to send and receive secure messages and access additional services without connecting to the kiosk. On May 15, 2024, the population at Taconic Correctional Facility became the first prison in DOCCS to benefit from making phone calls from their tablets. The phone application has been well received by the women at Taconic Correctional Facility as well as the residents of other facilities where the technology has been installed. The Department anticipates completing this initiative in all its correctional facilities by the end of the year.

#### Material Conditions and Environmental Issues

Taconic Correctional Facility is regularly supplied with potable water sourced from the New York City Aqueduct system, which is treated at the Town of Bedford Water Filtration Plant on Route 35. The water supply system had no known violations in 2023.

In 2023, the Taconic Correctional Facility was notified of planned maintenance to the Aqueduct from October 16<sup>th</sup> through November 9<sup>th</sup>, which would have created an interruption in the potable water source. This necessitated a temporary changeover to a different source. In preparation, the Town of Bedford planned for a standby supply and produced potable water at the Harris Road Well and purchased additional water from the Village of Mount Kisco. A public notice was posted prior to the changeover on October 10, 2023. Following the maintenance work (and the changeover supply period), the Town of Bedford and Taconic Correctional Facility returned to the New York City Aqueduct supply and Bedford plant. All Annual Water Quality Reports for all supplies utilized during 2023 were examined, and no water quality violations were documented from any source. The reports contain no evidence of unacceptable water quality or elevated lead levels.



With that said, it is notable that the New York City Aqueduct water is very soft, while water from the Harris Road well is considered hard. As a result, the water complaints indicated in the findings were likely related to this changeover and the perceived difference in taste going from soft water to hard water. Additionally, it is possible that the changeover supply could have resulted in increased iron content in the potable water, which could cause discoloration in laundry or other uses.

Regarding water temperature stability, there have been a few instances of unforeseen disruptions where equipment or infrastructure has failed. A one-day facility-wide steam shutdown required the replacement of key pressure relief valves serving the steam system and a compromised hot water heater in one of the buildings. Repairs have since been completed and there are no known issues. Regarding Unit 'G' in particular, the temperature controls were getting clogged at the time of the audit; corrective action to clean all shower body screens has taken place and new replacement cartridges have been ordered to ensure showers can be kept in service should the situation arise again in future.

Regarding facility temperature controls, similarly unforeseen repairs were required when the winter temperatures deviated from acceptable norms, which were caused by malfunctioning air handlers that were newly installed. Repairs to the equipment have been made and the air handlers have been working correctly since then. Other inconsistencies with the heat were likely related to the new air handlers not being balanced at the time, and some leaks in the system. All items have since been corrected through the New York State Office of General Services and an independent contractor. The facility added extra fans throughout the facility during the warmer months to maintain appropriate comfort zones for the residents. Additionally, in 2023, the Prison Relations Advisory Committee (PRAC) donated personal fans for all the women at Taconic Correctional Facility.

All areas of Taconic Correctional Facility are inspected on a weekly basis, and deficiencies are addressed promptly and appropriately. Capital projects are continually being undertaken to properly maintain the integrity of the facility as well as modernize the infrastructure.

#### Professionalism

The Department takes great pride in the professionalism of its work force and the sincere desire of its employees to perform their duties. Our effectiveness and strength come from our workforce and our adherence to important professional principles that we have come to operate under. Allegations of unprofessional conduct by staff are taken very seriously. DOCCS has a zero tolerance for violence or discrimination within our facilities and anyone engaged in misconduct will be disciplined, and if warranted, incidents will be referred for outside prosecution. DOCCS utilizes the Office of Special Investigations (OSI) to investigate allegations of staff misconduct and complaints of sexual abuse. Furthermore, allegations made regarding discrimination or racialized abuse are delegated to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) for review. When facts indicate that staff have acted unprofessionally, the matter is forwarded to the Department's Bureau of Labor Relations for appropriate disciplinary measures. Facilities must also be in compliance with all Prison Rape Elimination Act standards (PREA), which are audited on a regular basis.



Additionally, DOCCS has invested millions of dollars to implement pilot programs to improve safety within its facilities. This includes deployment of body-worn cameras and accompanying policies for their use at Taconic Correctional Facility. The Department is overhauling the existing fixed camera systems within Taconic Correctional Facility with construction currently underway.

The Department is committed to holding staff to the highest standards of public service. The Department takes pride in the degree of fairness, professionalism, integrity, and transparency expected of our staff in providing excellent service. All allegations of an employee not meeting those standards are investigated thoroughly and are taken very seriously. The Department has several safeguards in place to prevent and report misconduct. The incarcerated population has been educated on the many avenues to report allegations of misconduct and incidents of abusive behavior directly to facility staff and OSI, as well as outside agencies. The Facility Executive Team conducts daily rounds to observe facility operations and speak with staff and the incarcerated population by engaging with them directly. This assists the Executive Team in ensuring that the Department's policies are administered in a fair, equitable, and consistent manner and to spot any other issues of concern that have not been reported.

OSI serves as the Department's investigative body. The primary mission of OSI is to advance the mission and statutory mandates of the Department; vigorously pursue justice through fair, thorough, and impartial investigations; and foster accountability, integrity, and safety within the Department. The incarcerated population may write to any facility supervisory staff to report complaints. All complaints that are received by the facility are documented and investigated. This includes staff communications with incarcerated individuals. The incarcerated population have unrestricted access to OSI via the hotline and can report all alleged abuse.

As part of its functions, ODI reviews and monitors incarcerated individual programs and services for fairness and equity, as well as respond timely to complaints with allegations of discrimination. It is the policy of DOCCS to eliminate, mitigate, and respond to racial disparities to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of benefits and burdens in the placement of incarcerated individuals in housing unit assignments, institutional work assignments, and programs. ODI takes all allegations of racial slurs and misconduct seriously by thoroughly reviewing each incident. The Department is committed to maintaining a respectful, positive, and productive environment for the population under our care and supervision. Furthermore, all oral and written communications by employees to incarcerated individuals shall be accomplished in a professional, courteous, and dignified manner. Conduct or language which violates the Employees' Manuals, or fails to comply with direct orders, could result in administrative and/or disciplinary action. Any administrative processes associated with incarcerated individuals who may be subject to discipline and grievances are conducted fairly and in an impartial manner, to ensure that decisions are not influenced by stereotypes or bias based on their membership in a protected class, which include: age, race, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, marital or familial status, veteran's status, or criminal convictions history. To note, all staff must receive implicit bias training on an annual basis.

The camera systems previously noted bolster the efforts of investigators through objective and evidence-based examinations. Any substantiated case of misconduct by an employee is referred to the Department's Bureau of Labor Relations for consideration of disciplinary action, which may include



termination of the employee. In addition, any misconduct, where there is evidence of criminality, will be referred to outside law enforcement authorities for potential criminal charges. The Department maintains a zero-tolerance policy regarding verbal, physical or sexual abuse.

It should be noted that the allegations of verbal, physical, and sexual abuse reported by some incarcerated individuals are not consistent with the experiences and sentiment from staff and challenge the positive feedback reported by the majority of incarcerated individuals. This is reinforced by the impressions noted in the report as many incarcerated individuals expressed their appreciation for the staff professionalism at Taconic Correctional Facility, describing a positive staff culture, including effective communication. There are thousands of daily interactions where staff maintain fairness, professionalism, and integrity when providing essential services. As such, the macro relationship between staff and the incarcerated population is more aligned with an overall positive and appropriate relationship rather than a mixed experience.

#### Prison Rape Elimination Act

Regarding PREA resource centers, the Department offers victim advocacy and emotional support services to incarcerated victims of sexual abuse, which has been instrumental in helping victims who are incarcerated gain the support they need from an outside community provider. Our relationship with WestCOP-Victims Assistance Services and other Rape Crisis Programs has been paramount to our collaboration in helping individuals address their needs and receive services. The Department collaborates with other state entities, primarily the New York State Office of Victim Services and the New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, as well as a number of community-based programs to provide both rape crisis hotline services and connections for ongoing victim advocacy and emotional support. Taconic Correctional Facility works collaboratively with these organizations and the Crime Victims Treatment Center, which serves as the Statewide Coordinator for PREA Services with DOCCS.

The Department does not dictate the services provided. Both legal calls and legal visits are available to the providers. The provider and their client decide the most appropriate manner for the delivery of services; neither the facility nor the Department make that determination.

It is noted that the partnership with WestCOP-Victims Assistance Services has contributed to implementation of the "Growing Within These Walls" art therapy program and more recently to the implementation of domestic violence survivor support groups at both Taconic and Bedford Hills Correctional Facilities. These additional voluntary programs provide additional support to victims of sexual abuse and of domestic violence.

Regarding the reports of verbal, physical, or sexual abuse by staff at Taconic Correctional Facility, CANY continues to present surveys in a manner that produces responses of no evidentiary value. Of concern is that the questions presented are not limited to the respondent's experiences. Thus, a question about "seeing" some form of abuse or misconduct does not in any way measure what any given person has experienced, which does not accurately gauge misconduct, or allow for a meaningful review. For example, the affirmative from the 17 people does not demonstrate if they are capturing 17



separate events, or the same event 17 times. Further, in this instance, the question combines three separate types of abuse. This compound and vague question provides nothing of any evidentiary value to aid in an objective investigation of specific allegations. So that investigations of complaints may be timely initiated, the Department requests CANY to encourage the incarcerated individuals they are speaking with to promptly notify staff of any PREA related allegations.

It should be noted that Taconic Correctional Facility had their last PREA audit in November 2021. They not only met the standard on risk screening, but the auditor found the facility to have substantially exceeded the requirement of standards. <https://doccs.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2021/11/taconic-correctional-facility-prea-audit-report-11.11.2021-final.pdf>. It can be expected that Taconic will continue to maintain this high standard going forward.

Staffing - The Department, like many law enforcement agencies across the country, is experiencing challenges in its recruitment of staff. The Department is focused on recruiting and training those individuals coming forward to work for the Department. The Albany Training Academy is currently conducting successive Correction Officer Trainee Recruit classes. The Department is working swiftly to place qualified candidates into the training program. The Department partnered with the New York State Department of Civil Service to move the Correction Officer Trainee examination process to one of continuous recruitment, allowing the Department to better respond to our workforce needs.

Individuals who complete the Correction Officer Trainee application can expect to be canvassed within two to four weeks of their submission. Those who are interested in continuing the process are then screened to determine if they meet the qualifications. Once qualified, incoming recruits are placed in a Recruit Class, which are currently running on an approximate monthly basis.

Staff who are mandated to work over-time are afforded, upon request, a relief to make any necessary notifications or arrangements with their families. There are water fountains throughout the facility and the unions provide bottled water during times of high temperature.

#### Visitation

Taconic Correctional Facility welcomes the positive feedback regarding the visitation program. There are bright, clean, and inviting spaces for family and friends to connect with the incarcerated individuals. Staff set up tents to mitigate the effects of inclement weather on visitors waiting to be processed. Taconic Correctional Facility visitation programs run on weekends and holidays between the hours of 8:30a.m. to 3:30p.m. The schedule is posted on the DOCCS website. Additionally, Taconic Correctional Facility provides the opportunity to participate in the Family Reunion Program (FRP). This affords approved incarcerated individuals and their families the opportunity to meet for a designated period of time in a private home-like setting. This extended period and alternative setting preserves and strengthens family ties that have been disrupted as a result of incarceration; it fosters positive and responsible conduct and facilitates post-release reintegration into the family and community, thereby reducing the likelihood of recidivism.



The Department also works with the Osborne Association to host and facilitate video visitation at Taconic Correctional Facility. Video visitation sites are set up in Far Rockaway, Jamaica, and Long Island City. Moreover, the Hour Children organization arranges for special visits on birthdays, aids with a children's center, and facilitates foster care visitation. The culmination of these efforts provide incarcerated individuals with opportunities to maintain relationships with friends and relatives and to promote better community adjustment upon release. Contact with persons from the community provides incarcerated individuals with emotional support in adjusting to the custodial environment. With that in mind, we ensure that the space is accommodating and suitable for visits.

#### Medical

Taconic Correctional Facility is committed to providing quality health care that serves the medical needs of incarcerated individuals. Individuals at Taconic Correctional Facility have access to emergency medical care twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. An incarcerated individual can request emergency sick call at any time during the day or night. Clinic wait times may vary depending on the number of emergency cases requiring evaluation and treatment. When incarcerated individuals are transferred to Taconic Correctional Facility medical reviews with each incarcerated individual the sick; call procedures, emergency sick call procedures, medication refill processing, how to access providers, and appointment processing so that the incarcerated individual is well informed and educated.

In response to concerns about medication, the timeframe requirements for submitting refill requests are reviewed at facility orientation with each incarcerated individual. The expectation is that individuals will submit their refill requests within the specified timeframe to ensure refills are completed in a timely manner. Ability to self-carry medication is determined by the provider. Concerns regarding medications, including questions related to what medications were ordered by the provider and the route of administration, can always be addressed through the sick call process and with their treatment providers. All concerns are addressed with treatment providers and corrective action is taken when necessary.

Regarding the Medication Addiction Treatment (MAT) medication, two daily distributions occur at 11:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. The Department is unaware of any confirmed adverse effects as a result of the afternoon clinic. As of August 6, 2024, Taconic Correctional Facility had 55 participants in the MAT program.

Regarding the accessibility of dental services, a full-time dentist was hired and began working in January of 2024. Prior to that occurring, emergent dental care was provided by Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. Dental callouts are occurring regularly for preventative care and emergent issues to ensure dental care remains accessible to the population. Taconic Correctional Facility is committed to providing the incarcerated individuals with pro-active, preventive, and emergent dental care.

Regarding experiences with medical staff, it should be noted that it is not possible to respond to general concerns or circumstances without identifying the individual with a specific concern or citing a specific call out. As such, we are not able to comment on whether the treatment provided, or the interaction was appropriate. Additionally, if an incarcerated individual is identified, their health information is



considered confidential, and its release is protected by the Federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, the New York State Public Health Law, and Department policies. Privacy requirements do not allow the disclosure of specific health information without the incarcerated individual's written authorization. All requests for incarcerated individual health information, as well as inquiries regarding treatment, require authorization before the release of any information. Notwithstanding, in accordance with DOCCS' Employee Manual, all oral and written communication by employees to incarcerated individuals shall be accomplished in a professional, courteous, and dignified manner. It is the expectation that all medical staff are in compliance with this code of conduct. Additional information regarding staff professionalism may be viewed on page 8 of this response.

A review of the list of incarcerated individuals at Taconic Correctional Facility with a diagnosis of asthma found that nearly all had a diagnosis of asthma prior to their incarceration.

Since the date of the CANY visit, Taconic Correctional Facility has hired an additional physician, who started in June 2024. There are still three registered nurse vacancies; however, agency staff are utilized when available. Taconic Correctional Facility remains one of the most challenging locations to recruit nursing staff statewide. While staffing may at times be a challenge, nursing coverage minimums are maintained to meet the medical needs of the population and provide necessary treatment and services.

#### Mental Health

The Department partners with the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) in providing special programs along a continuum of care for incarcerated individuals with a mental illness. Taconic Correctional Facility is classified as Mental Health Level 2, as defined in Correction Law, § 2 (28). OMH has the statutory responsibility for providing mental health services to incarcerated individuals in our custody pursuant to Correction Law § 401. All mental health services in correctional facilities are provided through the Central New York Psychiatric Center (CNYPC), which is fully accredited by an independent organization, the Joint Commission (TJC).

Taconic Correctional Facility offers an array of mental health services that are consistent with the OMH level designation of the facility. OMH staffing consists of two full time social worker positions, a part time administrative support staff, and a part time psychiatrist. Currently OMH is utilizing two additional part time clinicians to cover the full-time position that is vacant. All mental health services are offered on an outpatient basis.

Incarcerated individuals in General Population who are on the OMH caseload are seen routinely for callouts at least every 30 days or as indicated by their provider. Individuals who need more support can request to see OMH or ask staff to make a referral. DOCCS does not determine the length of clinical callouts and will defer to OMH about their protocols. Referrals to OMH can come from staff, other incarcerated individuals or by the incarcerated individuals themselves. When a referral is made, the individual will be scheduled to be seen by OMH. Anyone in duress is immediately referred for OMH intervention. All common areas (libraries, transitional services, chapels, etc.) have posters encouraging the population to speak to staff if they are having a mental health crisis or need to speak to OMH.



Individuals in need of a higher level of care are transferred to another facility that can meet their mental health needs. All incarcerated individuals who engage in self-harm or who display behaviors that are consistent with suicidal ideations are immediately assessed by medical and mental health staff for a higher level of care. DOCCS emphasizes to staff the importance of recognizing warning signs of suicide in all situations. Once they are medically stable, they are assessed in a Residential Crisis Treatment Program (RCTP) and evaluated for suitability for special programs such as the Intermediate Care Program (ICP), or Transitional Intermediate Care Program (TrICP) if the individual's OMH level is modified to a level 1 or 1S.

### Grievances

The Incarcerated Grievance Program (IGP) is designed to provide each incarcerated individual with an orderly, fair, simple, and expedited method for resolving their concerns. While incarcerated individuals are still expected to resolve problems on their own, through informal communication with staff, the IGP provides a formal structure to help incarcerated individuals peacefully address issues. This process also allows the Department the opportunity to correct problems internally, identify issues in need of administrative attention, and clarify policies and procedures. The IGP is a non-adversarial process designed to allow staff and incarcerated individuals the opportunity to mediate resolutions to problems in the facility. In addition to addressing formal grievances, IGP staff also interact with incarcerated individuals through non-calendared contacts, which assists them in resolving problems without a formal grievance being filed.

The grievance procedure is initiated by the incarcerated individual. If an incarcerated individual is unable to resolve the problem through informal channels, the individual may file a written grievance within twenty-one calendar days of the incident in question (exceptions may be granted up to 45 days). The incarcerated grievance resolution committee (IGRC) has sixteen calendar days in which to attempt to informally resolve the complaint or hold a hearing. The IGRC is comprised of two voting incarcerated individuals, two voting staff members, and a non-voting chairperson, that can either be an incarcerated individual, staff member, or outside volunteer associated with the facility's program. The incarcerated individual has seven calendar days from the receipt of the IGRC's written response to appeal to the facility Superintendent. The Superintendent has up to 20 calendar days (25 calendar days for staff conduct complaints) to render a decision. If the incarcerated individual wishes to appeal further, the individual has seven calendar days from the receipt of the Superintendent's decision to appeal to the Central Office Review Committee (CORC). CORC is comprised of Central Office staff who review grievance appeals on behalf of the Commissioner. CORC is the final level of administrative review for grievances filed through the IGP mechanism.

Regarding allegations of retaliation in response to filing grievances, a review of the 2023 records established the program operates with a high level of access, fairness, and timeliness as intended, with no evidence of staff retaliation. The mood of the population also supports these findings. The grievance program is closely monitored by Central Office to ensure compliance with all protocols and support the appropriate use of the dispute resolution mechanism.



### Discipline

Incarcerated individuals in a correctional facility are expected to abide by certain rules of conduct, which are established to protect them from potential harm, either as a result of injury to their person or loss or damage of their property. Rules of conduct also serve to establish standards for behavior, which are both reasonable and consistent. Disciplinary action is one of many essential elements in correctional treatment. When applied reasonably and fairly, it not only assists in protection of the health, safety, and security of all persons within a correctional facility, but also is a positive factor in rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals and the morale of the facility.

Persons responsible for implementing disciplinary measures are expected to consider each situation individually. The control of incarcerated individual activities, including disciplinary action, must be administered in a completely fair, impersonal, and impartial manner and must be as consistent as possible. Disciplinary measures should not be overly severe and must never be arbitrary or capricious, or administered for the purpose of retaliation or revenge. Therefore, it is DOCCS policy that any administrative processes associated with incarcerated individuals who may be subject to discipline and grievances are conducted fairly, to ensure that decisions are not influenced by stereotypes or bias based on age, race, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, veteran's status, or non-violent political views.

SHU confinement guidelines are in compliance with the HALT. The guidelines reflect the elimination of "Keeplock", the elimination of pre-hearing confinement and confinement sanctions for Tier II incidents, and reduced confinement penalties for certain Tier III proceedings. Such sanctions are less restrictive than confinement to a SHU setting. Review Officers are expected to utilize the lowest appropriate tier level designation. Additionally, Hearing Officers must ensure they are progressive with the imposition of sanctions, dependent on articulable facts for the specific incident and circumstances at issue.

When an incarcerated individual is subject to a Superintendent's Hearing, they are permitted to be represented by an attorney, law student, paralegal, or incarcerated individual contingent upon the representative satisfying the requirements established by the Department's objective criteria. To ensure incarcerated individuals have the ability to contact their representative, direction has been issued to all facilities to accomplish this in an efficient and timely manner.

The safety of staff and incarcerated individuals continues to be of primary importance to the Department. As such, the Department has closely monitored the activities within our RRUs and alternative units, monitored program participation, along with key violence indicators, and engaged Superintendents, staff, and the incarcerated population. Careful steps have been taken to methodically perform individualized assessments to determine if an individual should be restrained while participating in out-of-cell programming, consistent with HALT.

The feedback reported regarding the disciplinary system at Taconic Correctional Facility may be attributed to a lack of understanding of the system in general or rooted in bias towards authoritative principles. All incarcerated individuals are encouraged review and site Directives and Regulations when challenging their disciplinary tickets. The incarcerated population has access to Department

Directives, Regulations, and various legal materials electronically on the Law Library Secure Offender Network (SON) and in print format in the law libraries. If an incarcerated individual believes a hearing was conducted unfairly or in violation of HALT, they are able to appeal its decision in accordance with Department policy dependent on the Tier level of the hearing.

In conclusion, Taconic Correctional Facility staff continually demonstrate the ability to maintain care, custody, and the well-being of the individuals sentenced to State imprisonment. Taconic Correctional Facility enhances the quality of the New York State criminal justice system by protecting lives, preserving peace, maintaining order, and enhancing public safety by having incarcerated individuals return home in a position to successfully reintegrate back to their community.





KATHY HOCHUL  
Governor

ANN MARIE T. SULLIVAN, M.D.  
Commissioner

MOIRA TASHJIAN, MPA  
Executive Deputy Commissioner

August 2, 2024

Jennifer Scaife  
Executive Director  
Correctional Association of New York  
Post Office Box 793  
Brooklyn, New York 11207

RE: Monitoring Visit to Taconic Correctional Facility – December 7, 2023

Dear Executive Director Scaife:

Thank you for sharing your post-visit briefing and recommendations regarding CANY's December 7, 2023, visit to Taconic Correctional Facility. We recognize that most of your report and findings are directed towards the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS); however, we would like to respond to the matters pertaining to the Office of Mental Health (OMH).

Table 4 indicates that, system wide, there were four suicides. However, by the time of CANY's visit, there had been 12 suicides throughout Corrections-Based Operations (CBO).

It is difficult for OMH to respond to the findings that incarcerated individuals expressed a "lack of confidence in the system...and accessibility [of mental health services]" as limited information was provided as to what this means to the incarcerated individuals. Mental health staff are available to incarcerated individuals either during scheduled callouts or via referral. Contrary to a quoted statement, mental health staff respond to all requests to be seen; they do not only respond if "you say you're going to kill yourself." As indicated in previous responses, incarcerated individuals are aware, and should be reminded, of how to contact OMH should they need mental health support. They are able to do this either via self-referral or by asking a staff member to submit a referral on their behalf. It is possible, however, that incarcerated individuals are not seen as quickly as they would like, as mental health staff need to triage the referrals, they receive along with the already scheduled appointments for the day and any crisis situations that may occur. CNYPC policy requires regular, non-immediate referrals to be addressed within 14 days of receipt. These parameters are established in order to ensure that crises or other immediate needs can be met while still addressing non-emergent requests in a timely fashion. Community mental health services are no different in that crises and emergent issues are addressed immediately, and more routine needs or less urgent questions are referred to outpatient settings for follow up.

The mental health treatment team is comprised of trained professionals who provide services as clinically indicated. If needed, the team will consult with other members of OMH across the state to ensure the incarcerated individual is able to benefit from all available services, such as psychological testing for diagnostic clarification or transfer to a facility with additional programs.

However, as indicated in CANY's report, Taconic does have a social work vacancy and has had difficulty with recruitment. Though recruitment efforts continue in earnest, this is an issue that is occurring nationwide in the mental health field and is not specific to corrections. Despite this, Taconic mental health clinical staff assess the incarcerated individuals thoroughly and ensure patients are seen per policy and as needed.

Sincerely,



Li-Wen Lee, M.D.  
Associate Commissioner  
Division of Forensic Services

cc: Danielle Dill, Psy.D., Executive Director, CNYPC  
William Vertoske, Deputy Director, Corrections Based Operations, CNYPC  
File



December 7, 2023

# Monitoring Visit to Taconic Correctional Facility

Post-Visit Briefing  
Correctional Association of New York

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