

Essay on recommended course of action

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Overview

The Department of Corrections has changed its mail room policy to reduce the risk of contraband inflow through the mail and to reduce its burden on existing correctional officers. The measures taken include the introduction of a postcard that inmates can use to communicate with the outside world. According to the Commissioner, this postcard will end the flow of contraband through the mail and more easily managed by the existing staff. He also believes that this measure will reduce the overtime burden of staff. The inmates, their families and lawyers see this measure as a violation of the First Amendment; they react with lawsuits. The politicians, media and rights groups also rally the cause of the inmates. They demand in unison to repeal the changes and revert to the earlier mail room system.

Introduction

This paper evaluates the new corrections mailroom policy. The new measure needs to curb the mailroom issues and ensure that new issues do not rise as a result of its implementation. All process changes affect other aspects in a community however; the success depends on the rate in which the other effects settle down. Moreover, the new change cannot be deemed as a positive turnover if it stirs other problems that have dangerous consequences.

Issues at hand

The United States of America has the largest concentration of prison population in the world. Over two million prison inmates requires an enormous workforce to provide security, counseling, management of

services, ward managers, vocational course management, dispensary support and mailroom assistance. (ALEC, 2009)

The Department of Corrections is heavily understaffed to provide the effective support to this cause. There is also a growing need for additional space and personnel to manage this massive operation. Eventually, with no concrete plan to enable recruitment to fill vacant positions, existing staff are mandated with additional duties. This creates enormous stress and psychological issues for the existing staff; increasing the chances of attrition.

Overcrowded Facility

Correctional facilities are overcrowded creating massive sprout in violence, disease and substance abuse. Managing this population effectively is an enormous challenge. The safety of correctional officers is turning out to be a significant burden.

Hence, all support that consumes more energy with lesser impact of running a correctional facility is scrutinized. The mailroom is definitely one of those areas; when viewed by administrators. It requires significant man-hours with very limited outcome of the running of a prison facility.

Inmates

The inmates of a correctional facility have limited access to the society they left; families, friends and acquaintances. They rely heavily on the mailroom for this; photographs of family members, books, legal documents, etc. The new policy of denying packages will deal a devastating blow to any normalcy achieved by the inmates. Postcards are ineffective in safeguarding

confidential information and infringe on the privacy of inmates as well as their societal contacts.

Constitution and Law

The new mailroom policy infringes on a variety of Constitutional Amendments included in the bill of rights. These include,

- First Amendment: Right to freedom, right to freedom of privacy. Griswold v. Connecticut (1965).
- Fourteenth Amendment: thirty ninth clauses of Magna Carta.
- The Privacy Act of 1974.

(Cornell University of Law, 2014)

Statement of Facts

Administrators always gauge the facts at hand and derive a plan of action. Although this might be viewed as an admirable strategy, administrators (public and private) almost always miss out on the actual purpose of the exercise.

The correctional system is not only a place for convicted felons to serve their sentences; it is a processing system that owns the responsibility of rehabilitating them; eventually allowing them to become a part of the society at some stage. Correctional facilities offer venues for inmates to allow their successful return to society and one of those is contact with friends, families and associates.

Inadequate Staffing

Inadequate staffing is a genuine issue especially in a correctional facility. Although the job description commonly requires a high school diploma or

GED and potentially pays over \$39, 000 per annum; the Department of Corrections has not publicized vacancies adequately in the social media to try filling the positions. The average potential earning of a high school graduate in the United States of America is \$21, 000 per annum. This is almost 45% lower than what a correctional officer earns. (Education Portal, 2014)

Moreover, the Department's decision to infringe on three Constitutional Amendments at the cost of potentially millions of dollars in lawsuit settlements is suspect. (Williams, 2014)

Threats to population from contraband

The influx of contraband is potentially harmful to both inmates and correctional officers. Contraband items range from drugs, weapons, mobile phones, cigarettes, burglary tools, etc. The threat to the prison population and even society from these items is very real. However, the infringement on the rights of inmates and the society are not an answer.

Flaws in new system

Prison inmates vary from case to case. The United States Constitution allows the right to appeal against sentences and convictions. These processes however involve vast amounts of paperwork; not all of the lawyers would be able to visit their clients in prison and much of this paperwork is corresponded through the mail. (US Department of State, 2014)

It is impossible to contain such vast data on a postcard. This plots a more devious plan than a system to free up correctional staff of additional work. It directly impedes the appeals process of the prison population. It also

restricts the flow of information from the prison walls to society.

Overcrowded prisons are no stranger to sexual, physical and verbal abuse.

The victims of such abuse have no choice but to live in their shadows with no scope of rescue under the new mailroom policy.

Potential threats that evolve from the new policy

Correctional officers are constantly under threat of violence from the inmate population. Infringing on the rights of the prison population will rapidly increase the chance of violence against correctional staff. Sections of inmate or even family and friends outside the prison walls might try to harm correctional officers.

Overriding purpose

Correctional facilities are not medieval dungeons. We do not lock up felons and throw away the keys. It is the responsibility of the correctional facility to rehabilitate and prepare its population with re-entering society without threat. The key elements that help achieve this outcome are the inmate population's contact with the society, their belief in the fairness of the law and their positive response to prison programs.

The fundamental platform for most inmates is their ability to freely communicate with their societal contacts. This communication also provides vital encouragement to go-clean once they are released. Infringing on this element of an inmate's road to social normalcy is potentially contrary to the correctional process.

Inevitable costs - Lawsuits

The new changes to the mailroom infringe the Privacy Act of 1974 in addition to the First and Fourteenth Amendments. The Department of Correction's pleading ignorance to the Constitutional Amendments or context of interpretation would be struck down under the Ninth Amendment. Hence, losses pertaining to lawsuits and forcible repeal of the policy cannot be ruled out in this matter.

The Department of Corrections, in this case did not exhaust all options to solve its staffing issue. It also failed to look at alternate measures that would take care of the space option. Instead, they decided to proceed in a direction that they deemed to be cost-effective. Although the postcard initiative seems an effective measure to curb the inflow of contraband, it is not the only source of contraband in prisons.

Corruption is also an effective avenue to smuggling contraband into prisons. The post card system could halt mailroom infiltration and instigate corruption among correctional officers for which the risk is exponentially higher. Moreover, it can spawn new risks for correctional officers in the form of violence in retaliation to the new policy and the risk of prison rioting increases substantially.

Prelude

Phase I – Inmate Deployment

Prison mail rooms require personnel to man sorting, distribution and inspection. While inspection requires direct correctional supervision, inmates with exemplary behavior records could be allowed to handle the sorting and distribution. Their supervision can be monitored through closed-circuit

television cameras. The duties can be randomized to prevent malpractice. There are two benefits in this phase, it frees correctional officers from overtime duties and it provides inmates with an option of rehabilitation and recreation.

Phase II – Upgrading Technology

The history of civilization has proven that technology rescued humanity from the problem of overuse. Technology enabled New York City to overcome its pileup of horse manure in 1900s with the Ford T model. (Johnson, 2014)

Similarly, the computer sorted out our need to compute thousands of instructions in a short span of time. Likewise, correctional facilities should employ advanced measures such as installation of x-ray conveyor systems similar to the ones in airports. This system can effectively filter out potentially harmful packages even before they breach the prison compound. This system will also reduce the time spent on inspection by correctional staff. Although this option seems to be expensive, it will save thousands of taxpaying dollars in the long run.

Phase III – Effective hiring from the market

The Department of Corrections should undertake trips to local high schools to publicize the position of correctional officers among graduating students. Studies in job recruitments suggest that ignorance is the main reason potential candidates don't apply for certain positions. The Department of Corrections should also encourage internships within their administrative structure. Filling up positions by only advertising on select newspapers will not be effective since the target population for this position spends

exhaustive amounts of time on the internet. Televised announcements can also rope in desired cadets. If the Department feels inadequate to work out such an elaborate recruitment, they should outsource it to private recruitment firms in the United States.

Phase IV: New Hire Deployment

New hires should be mandated to work in the mailroom as part of their internship. They should be monitored and mentored to allow them learn the procedures/protocols in action. This will allow experienced officers to focus on more important duties within the correctional facility. The presence of rookie officers on the premises will ease the stress and pressure off the senior officers.

Phase V: Reverting to the old system

The final step to reverting to the prior mailroom system should be completed in parts. The correctional facility should split the prison population into different sections based on their behavior and time spent in the facility. The sections should then be allowed to revert to the prior system at a steady pace. Moreover, the different sections should be restored with their mailroom privileges in equal intervals. Furthermore, a total weight limit on packages for the month can be imposed to allow the effective curbing of contraband influx; automation can track the mailroom weight quota for each inmate separately.

Conclusion

Correctional officers face a real threat in stress, violence and depression while performing their duties. Their job is one of the most demanding in the

law enforcement field. They are required to watch over serial killers, rapists, murderers, gang members, armed robbers among many forms of convicted felons. Their biggest threat is contraband influx of addictive substances and improvised weapons. However, the United States does not advocate draconian measures for its prison population. The Bill of Rights holds good for distinguished members of the society and even for convicted felons. Any form of infringement on the Constitutional Amendments result in injustice, prejudice and victimization. Hence, the mailroom measure taken up by the Department of Corrections must be repealed.

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