



OFFICE OF THE  
OMBUDS FOR CORRECTIONS

# Crumbling Conditions Create Crisis in MN Prisons

<https://mn.gov/obfc/>

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# Office of Ombuds for Corrections

The Office of the Ombuds for Corrections (OBFC) is **separate and independent** from the Department of Corrections. Our role is to:

- Investigate complaints from incarcerated people, staff, and community.
- Investigate systemic concerns.
- Facilitate resolutions, make recommendations, and publish reports.
- Provide education and information to help people navigate the system.

**Mission:** To promote the highest attainable standards of competence, efficiency, and justice in the administration of corrections. [Minnesota Statute 241.90](#)

# Ombuds for Corrections: Objectives and Priorities

## Objectives

- Provide oversight.
- Promote efficiency and justice.
- Promote equity and fairness.
- Increase health and safety for incarcerated people, staff, and community by improving correctional programs, policies, and practices; provide an outlet, and increase community safety.



**Priorities:** Issues affecting health, safety, and actions or policies that have an impact on multiple individuals.



MINNESOTA

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDS  
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# Crumbling Conditions Create Crisis in Minnesota Prisons

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

<https://mn.gov/obfc/reports/>

# Introduction

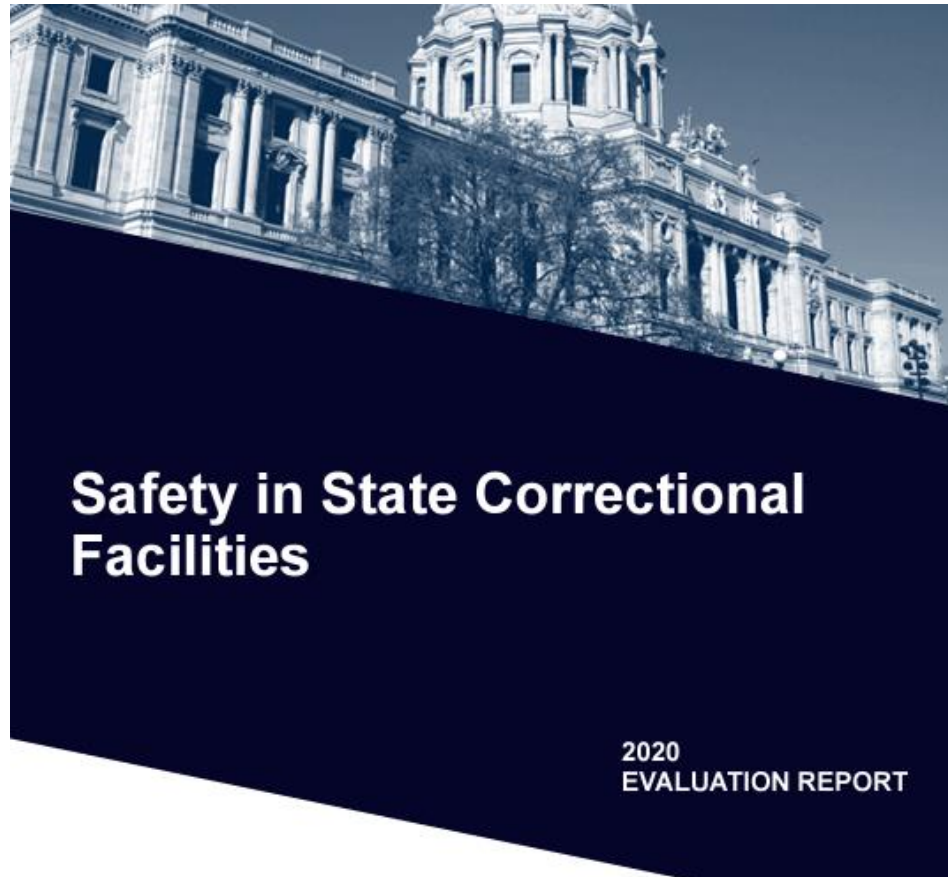


**Minnesota prisons, under-resourced for decades, are crumbling.**

We must develop a strategy to:

- dedicate resources to upgrade and maintain facilities.
- replace facilities that are unsafe and cannot be adequately rehabilitated.

# 2020 Office of Legislative Auditor Report



Key recommendations in OLA Safety in State Correctional Facilities report included the necessity for

**a strategy and funding to address the infrastructure and safety needs**

in Minnesota prisons.

<https://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/ped/2020/prisonsafety.htm>

# Highest Needs Facilities



*Photo Sources MN Historical Society and MN DOC*

# Highest Needs: MCF-St. Cloud and MCF-Stillwater



Design features are outdated, increasing danger for incarcerated persons and staff.

A 2014 study for replacing MCF- St. Cloud came with a price of 400 million dollars; due to inflation, that is now likely as high as **1 billion dollars.**

**Continuing to delay funding for addressing needs increases costs.**



# All DOC Facilities Have Significant Needs

Every DOC facility has significant infrastructure needs, including:

- Remediation
- Roof leaks
- Flooding
- Water infrastructure and filtration
- Tuckpointing for interior and exterior walls
- Outdated materials and unable to access parts



# Needs Across all 11 Facilities

Deteriorating buildings at every DOC facility pose significant safety risks:

- Loose and falling bricks that can be weaponized
- Staff resources directed toward mitigating standing water rather than attending to primary programming and security responsibilities
- Sightline concerns



# Future Investments

Decades of under-resourcing has led to a deferred maintenance cost of \$720 million.

- Benefit of investing significant state resources into failing structures that do not best serve public safety needs?
- Evaluate cost of investing in new facilities.



# Inhumane Toll

Degraded prison infrastructure takes an inhumane toll on staff, incarcerated people, and community safety in Minnesota.



Unaddressed infrastructure needs leads to:

- Unsafe working conditions for staff
- Staffing challenges
- Forced overtime
- More staff needed to monitor facilities
- Increased stress



*Photo Dave Schwarz, St. Cloud Times*

# Incarcerated Person Safety

Unaddressed infrastructure needs leads to:

- Increased violence
- Increased stress and trauma
- Decrease in programming and opportunities for success
- And unaddressed health needs



[Photo kare11.com](http://kare11.com)

# Growing Needs of Population

Of particular concern is the vulnerable incarcerated population, especially those affected by:

- aging
- chronic illness
- mental health issues
- substance use disorders
- disabilities



A long-term strategy is critical as antiquated prison facilities are not equipped to house and provide the high-level care that is increasingly in demand.

# Unmanageable Challenges

Despite the best efforts of staff and incarcerated people to manage a difficult situation, decades of under-resourcing have led to a public safety crisis.





# Recommendations

Prioritize significant resources to meet the safety and security needs that preserve health and human dignity.

Additionally, review opportunities to ensure resources are best utilized by incorporating:

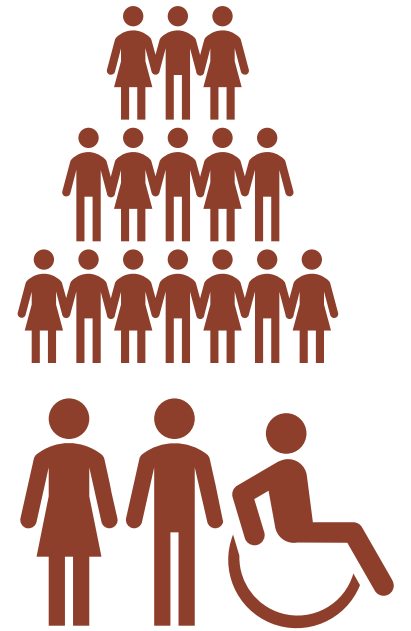
- Population Reduction
- Comprehensive Infrastructure Plan



# Population Reduction

Population reduction, for those who pose little public safety risk and could be better served in community, requires investments in:

- Work release
- Medical and elder release
- Release revocation reduction
- Sentencing reviews
- Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act



# Comprehensive Infrastructure Plan

Targeted funding that provides for a comprehensive review and long-term corrections planning:

- Legislative task force to direct plan or study.
- Include all DOC facilities and not just the two highest needs facilities.
- Address security, safety, and programming needs.
- Full scope, multi-phase, long-term infrastructure plan.



# Maintain, Upgrade, and Invest

For those who must remain incarcerated,  
and for the many dedicated staff who report to work under less  
than desirable conditions,

**maintaining,**

**upgrading,**

**and investing** in new facilities where necessary is

**critical to ensure the health and safety of staff and  
incarcerated people.**

# Contact

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