



**City of Philadelphia
Office of the City Controller**

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**Controller Rhynhart Calls for Staffing Increase at Philadelphia Prisons
Department to Improve Safety for Correctional Officers and Inmates**

Department of Prisons vacancies have tripled since 2019.

Philadelphia, PA – After several months of data collection and analysis, including conversations with Philadelphia Department of Prisons management and visits to two Prisons’ facilities, City Controller Rebecca Rhynhart called on the Kenney Administration to hire at least 300 new correctional officers over fiscal year 2022 (FY22) to ensure the safety of Prisons staff and inmates. From FY19 to April of FY21, the inmate count at the Department of Prisons declined slightly, while staff vacancies tripled and conditions inside Prisons’ facilities became increasingly unsafe.

“The Department of Prisons is at a tipping point. Inadequate staffing levels have led to unsafe conditions for workers and confinement of inmates, many of whom are pre-trial, to their cells – sometimes for 20 or more hours a day,” said Controller Rhynhart. “The City is responsible for the Department of Prisons’ more than 1,500 correctional officers and approximately 4,600 inmates. We have a duty to provide safe working conditions and humane living conditions. The City must take an all-hands-on-deck approach to reach this hiring goal, with rigorous recruitment and multiple classes.”

According to data provided by the Department of Prisons, 4,487 inmates were housed in Prisons’ facilities during the second quarter of FY21, a 4% decrease over FY19’s inmate count (4,675). Meanwhile, correctional staffing declined by 23% or 440 officers, from 1,942 in FY19 to 1,502 officers in FY21. Additionally, separations through attrition have increased considerably, with 300 separations as of May 10th of FY21 compared to 171 separations in FY19. Over the two-year period, only 119 new correctional officers were hired. The current Post Plan, the approved policy regarding staff deployment for Philadelphia Prisons to ensure the safety of both inmates and staff, calls for 1,884 officers, 382 officers more than the current staffing level.

“The one thing that the union isn’t responsible for is hiring. Only the City can do that,” said David Robinson, President of AFSCME District Council 33 Local 159. “The City needs to hire so that correctional officers can do their duty and the City needs to recognize correctional officers as law enforcement and treat them with the same respect as police and sheriff’s deputies.”

Between August 2020 and May 2021, there were five inmate on inmate homicides at Philadelphia Prisons’ facilities, a total higher than the eight years prior combined.

Councilmember Kendra Brooks added, “The COVID-19 pandemic has made it painfully clear that the conditions of our prisons are inhumane and unacceptable. I have spent the past few months making regular visits to prison facilities where I’ve seen and talked to incarcerated individuals who are prohibited from leaving their cells; who must decide between bathing and calling family members; or who are exposed to dangerous conditions due to staffing shortages. We can no longer make excuses for the unsafe conditions of our prisons. Incarcerated individuals and their families deserve answers, and they need a plan.”

Pennsylvania Prison Society Education and Advocacy Fellow Anton Andrew said, “What is happening in Philadelphia’s prisons today is so far from normal. It is not safe, and it is not humane. In March of this year, the number of complaints we received regarding the Philadelphia Department of Prisons doubled. It doubled again in April and hasn’t gone down. The City of Philadelphia has an important and urgent choice to make - can we do what other counties have done and safety reduce the number of our fellow citizens who are locked up?”

Controller Rhyhart reiterated her call on Mayor Kenney to hire more than 300 officers immediately. “We need an all-hands-on-deck strategy to hire more than 300 new correctional officers immediately. Because we own this problem. We owe it to our correctional officers for them to feel supported and safe and we owe it to those who are incarcerated to be housed in humane, safe conditions. We need to fix this now.”