
Auditor's Summary

Audit of the Department of Public Safety

Report No. 22-05



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ACCURATELY DETERMINING the appropriate level of staffing on a day-to-day basis is important for any organization. However, unlike many other state organizations, jails and prisons operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, providing services for persons who have been charged with or convicted of committing criminal offenses and requiring essential security posts in those facilities to be filled every shift.

To determine the number of security staff positions (Adult Correctional Officers or ACOs) needed to safely operate facilities without having to close posts, suspend inmate programs, re-assign ACOs, and rely on significant amounts of overtime, correctional institutions employ a staffing multiplier called a shift relief factor, an important metric that accounts for staff absences. The shift relief factor uses the actual instances (either days or hours) ACOs are unable to work their regularly assigned posts – whether because of approved and unapproved leave, training requirements, and other work assignments, among other things – to determine the number of full-time ACO positions needed to keep a security post occupied for a single eight-hour work shift. The number of needed security staff positions at a particular facility is the product of the shift relief factor multiplied by the number of the facility's permanent security posts. The shift relief factor is a well-recognized tool in determining and managing security staffing needs and employee schedules.

Although not a cure-all for these challenges, the shift relief factor is a critical part of determining security staffing needs and relies on the department identifying the correct data needed and ensuring that data is compiled in a timely, complete, accurate, and reliable manner.

We recognize that the shift relief factor is one of many considerations in determining the correct level of security staffing and that the department faces many other challenges, especially during the pandemic. Although not a cure-all for these challenges, the shift relief factor is a critical part of determining security staffing needs and relies on the department identifying the correct data needed and ensuring that data is compiled in a timely, complete, accurate, and reliable manner.

What we found

In Report No. 22-05, *Audit of the Department of Public Safety*, we found the department's current shift relief factor, which was calculated more than five decades ago, does not account for, among other things, federal and state regulations that have been enacted subsequently, changes to collective bargaining agreements, and other conditions that have increased the amount of leave ACOs are entitled to use as well as training ACOs must complete, all of which have significantly increased the instances when ACOs are unable to cover their regularly assigned posts. Without an up-to-date and accurate shift relief factor, the department does not know the number of ACO positions it needs to operate its correctional facilities, and as a result, its wardens must routinely resort to "band-aid" solutions to cover security posts in their facilities: closing posts, suspending inmate programs, re-assigning staff, and excessive overtime.

We also found the department has not developed a process to accurately and consistently collect the data needed to calculate the shift relief factor. Nearly 30 years ago, in our 1992 report, we had raised concerns about the quality of the data used by the department in its attempt to update its shift relief factor. We had recommended that DPS implement information systems to keep track of each category of lost time and any resultant overtime. In a follow-up report two years later, we noted that the department still lacked an information system that could deliver needed data on a reliable, timely, and readily usable basis. We again recommended the department continue to give high priority to developing one that would produce reliable data for determining the shift relief factor.

Almost 30 years later, the department still has not implemented a system to collect, compile, and maintain complete, reliable employee leave and absence data. And, without that data, the department cannot determine the number of security positions it needs.

Why did these problems occur?

In Report No. 94-18, *A Follow-up Review of Security Staffing in the Department of Public Safety*, published in November 1994, we recommended among other things that the department continue to give high priority to developing and implementing information and control systems that would produce reliable data for determining the shift relief factor. We also recommended that the department continue its efforts to maintain accurate leave records and timesheets. In this regard, we urged the department to pursue the development of an automated system to replace its current manual processes for recording leave time. These recommendations were never fully implemented. And, today, the department still

lacks a data collection system to collect up-to-date, consistent, and accurate data needed to calculate a shift relief factor.

According to the current Director, updating the shift relief factor is not a department priority. Consequently, the department has made little effort to collect the data needed to do so. A majority of the eight wardens we spoke with said the department has not provided guidance regarding the data reporting – documented or otherwise – leaving staff at some prisons to figure it out on their own. This lack of guidance, i.e., policies and procedures, has resulted in inconsistencies in data collection and reporting. For instance, at one facility we visited, when an ACO calls in sick, but no overtime was generated as a result (i.e., another ACO working on the same shift is reassigned to the vacant post or the vacant post is closed), the absent ACO's hours were not included in the sick leave totals reported in the facility's general summary report, which should account for all leave taken. When we pointed out this inconsistency, which contributed to the underreporting of sick leave totals, the staff assigned to input data for the facility's reports explained they did not have any policies and procedures for preparing the reports and did the best they could to figure it out on their own.

The Director noted that there are other priorities such as filling vacancies and monitoring other types of leave like workers compensation. While we understand the department's urgency to fill existing vacancies, it is critical for the department to know the number of ACO positions it needs; it is the Director who must prioritize updating the department's shift relief factor and convey the importance of collecting the data needed to do so. He must set the appropriate "tone at the top."

Why do these problems matter?

The National Institute of Corrections believes that access to accurate, high-quality data that can be presented in the appropriate formats is a precondition of effective management support in the jail system. However, the department still has not developed a tool to collect and compile the needed data and, perhaps even more concerning, the department still has no policies or procedures relating to collecting such data.

Until the department knows the number of ACO positions needed to cover the security posts in its facilities, wardens must resort to regularly closing posts, suspending inmate programs, re-assigning ACOs, and relying on significant amounts of overtime. Those types of "triage" measures likely increase work stresses and risks to security staff as well as to inmates. The department needs to base its staffing requirements on timely, objective information, which includes an up-to-date shift relief factor calculated using actual data about the instances ACOs are unable to cover their regularly assigned posts.

We note that an updated shift relief factor data will provide credibility to the department's staffing analysis and provides stronger support for its staffing requests to the Legislature.