



45TH DISTRICT  
STATE CAPITOL  
P.O. BOX 30014  
LANSING, MI 48909-7514

MICHIGAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**SARAH L. LIGHTNER**

PHONE: (517) 373-1773  
FAX: (517) 373-5838  
SarahLightner@house.mi.gov  
www.RepLightner.com

September 12, 2023

ATTN: Doug Ringler, CPA, CIA  
Michigan Office of Auditor General  
525 West Ottawa Street  
Lansing, MI 48933

Dear Auditor General Ringler:

I am writing to request an inquiry regarding potential staffing issues and violations within the Michigan Department of Corrections. As State Representative of the 45<sup>th</sup> District, I have several prisons in and around my community, which has led to a great number of employees and residents sharing concerning facts and testimonies regarding these facilities. I believe these observations may be mirrored outside of my immediate region as well. Accordingly, I am deeply troubled about the well-being of our state employees and the impact these potential issues may have on the state's correctional facilities and surrounding communities.

Over the past several months, I have received consistent reports from various sources, including prison staff members and concerned citizens, about inexcusable staffing shortages and alleged violations of federal and state labor regulations within the Michigan Department of Corrections. The most prominent concerns that have been brought to my attention include:

1. **Short staffing:** Employees from multiple prisons have reported that staffing levels have reached critical lows, resulting in safety risks for both the inmates and staff members. This shortage of staff is detrimental to maintaining a secure and humane correctional environment. Moreover, it results in overworking correctional officers, which eventually takes a toll on their mental well-being and personal lives.
2. **Violations of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA):** Several employees claim to have faced retaliation or adverse actions after utilizing their rights under FMLA. Such actions, if true, not only infringe upon the employees' rights but also create an atmosphere of fear and reluctance to take necessary medical leave.
3. **Violations of the 32-hour mandatory overtime rule:** Reports have suggested that prison staff members are being subjected to excessive mandatory overtime, exceeding the 32-hour limit set forth by state law. This practice can lead to burnout, decreased morale, and potential lapses in security and safety.

4. Other alleged violations: Additional allegations relate to potential violations of workplace safety protocols, fair labor practices, and employee well-being. Some of these citations are anecdotal mistreatment by management, while others are legally problematic, if factual. Staff have been hesitant to share specific details about these alleged violations as specificity may “out” them to their superiors.

Given the gravity of these claims and the potential implications they could have on the safety and well-being of staff and inmates, I believe it is essential to conduct an unbiased and thorough investigation into these matters. As such, I respectfully request that the Michigan Office of Auditor General initiate an independent audit of the Michigan Department of Corrections to examine the accuracy of these claims and determine whether any legislative action or policy changes are necessary to address them effectively. I have the utmost confidence in the expertise and integrity of your office, and I believe that a comprehensive audit will provide clarity and transparency regarding the situation.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I kindly request that your office keep me informed about the progress of the investigation and any subsequent findings or recommendations. If necessary, I am willing to provide any additional information or support your office may need to aid in the successful execution of this audit.

Should you require any further information or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely,



Representative Sarah L. Lightner