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Staff level at Chase questioned

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State Rep. George Hasay is trying to ease the fears held by some inside State Correctional Institution at Dallas.

Hasay said "worried" corrections officers from the facility approached him recently and said inmate rioting is possible unless staffing levels are raised.

They expressed concerns for their safety due to a high frequency of assaults on corrections officers by inmates, said Hasay.

Hasay states the officers believe the assaults are directly related to the staffing levels.

The corrections officers' union, Pennsylvania State Corrections Officers Association (PSCOA), claims there have been at least 33 assaults on officers since June.

The union has been lobbying lawmakers for months to act on the problem. Similar claims have been echoed from other corrections officers in the state.

Hasay, R-117, is now asking the state Department of Corrections to investigate.

"All over the state, our people are being taken from the prisons in ambulances (from assaults)," said Roy Pinto, Vice President PSCOA.

Pinto claims the corrections department - in an attempt to tighten its budget - is not fully staffing posts at prisons, placing already outnumbered officers at serious risk.

"An inmate goes bad and things go downhill quickly. You're battling to survive. Knowing you have a guy watching your back is a relief," he said.

Despite Pinto's claims, the prisons and their posts are "fully staffed," said DOC spokeswoman Susan McNaughton.

The DOC does a manpower survey each year and assigns each facility with the number of officers that would be considered adequate. All of the state prisons are currently adequate, she said.

James McGrady, deputy superintendent at Dallas, said the facility's officer-to-inmate ratio is more than adequate and is second best in the DOC.

McGrady said PSCOA's claim of 33 assaults since June is inaccurate.

"That number is inflated. Assaults do occur, but we try to keep them to a minimum," he said.