

Editor:

Overcrowding and understaffing at our state correctional institutions is such a concern that legislation (Senate Bill 362) is being introduced to mandate staffing levels. This obviously is a major issue for corrections officers, whose lives are at risk when there is no one to watch their backs.

In the first six weeks of 2005 alone, 36 state corrections officers were assaulted, including assaults at Dallas and Retreat.

The number and viciousness of these assaults is increasing - one sign we see of growing unrest in our prisons. If it's one thing inmates understand, it's a numbers advantage.

Understaffing also is a safety issue for other prison employees, inmates and members of the community, who are all at risk.

Pennsylvania has a record state prison population of nearly 41,000 inmates - 8,500 more than just three years ago. Senate Bill 362 would require the department to tie staffing to that population, adding positions or deleting them if the number of inmates goes down.

Yes, budgets are tight at all government levels. But we believe that skimping on prison staff and arguing that technology can do the job is risky business. Our officers never knew a camera or a fence that could rush to rescue anyone during an attack.

Because the Department of Corrections is not hiring corrections officers funded in the previous state budget, we need legislative action to better ensure prison safety. We ask your readers to let their state legislators know that they care about this important safety issue.

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