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Very few of us ever see the inside of a prison, whether at the county, state or federal levels. In fact, with the exception of the Schuylkill County Prison and others like it in neighboring counties, most modern state and federal prison facilities are not in view, with only their access roads showing that they even exist.

The beating of a 14-year veteran corrections officer at the state prison in Mahanoy Township in late February and the escape of two inmates from the Schuylkill County Prison could be unrelated incidents, or they may indicate the need for immediate upgrades in staffing. Most likely, it's the latter. Putting it bluntly, the public wants the courts to get tougher on criminals. That means incarcerating more of them in a limited number of prisons. But as the inmate populations increase, obviously the ratio of correctional officers has not kept pace, and from what it looks like, may actually be falling back at a greater rate. That is absolutely not an acceptable situation. If we want prisoners behind bars, we better be ready to cough up the dollars to make sure they've got enough guards watching them. Also, many prisons lost officers in recent years because of the call-up of military reserve units for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and since replacing experienced prison officers is not something that can be done easily, further staffing deficiencies occurred, even with sufficient payroll budgets.

The governments at all three levels are playing with people's lives when they cut back on proper staffing at prisons. The public's first concern has to be for those officers who are the frontline of defense, who must deal with inmates day after day, and most likely worry from time to time about when they walk into their workplace to begin a shift whether they'll be walking out at the end of it.

For once, just once, let's get government officials — the elected and the bureaucrats — to show more humane concern for those who guard our convicted criminals rather than for the criminals themselves.

Shamokin News Item