

The North Dakota State Penitentiary is an institution that aims to be at the forefront of corrections reform for the United States. This goal is one that I feel is a breath of fresh air to the prison system and a much needed one at that. Locking people up and throwing away the key has been the mindset in the past, but it is one that has not worked and we aim to be the pathway to a better future that revolves around rehabilitation. We attempt to do this by treating those in custody with respect and giving them the tools they need to be successful when they re-enter society. To do this is no simple task, and requires the right staff if we want to be successful.

With that being said, this profession isn't the most glamorous and it requires Officers that are not only willing to put in the extra effort to try and achieve our goal, but can perform well under high pressure situations while also making good decisions on the fly. Needless to say, this is not a job that just anyone can perform and it has become increasingly hard to find people to enter this profession as Officers for at least a year now. This is not an un-skilled labor job, yet the pay would have you believing it is when you can go to places like Wal-Mart and make a very similar starting wage.

Getting new staff is only one part of the problem though. Retaining staff is the bigger issue, as we lose with them a lot of knowledge that is required to successfully run this institution, especially if we want to work towards our vision and properly train staff to do the same. With the lack of adequate raises, we received no raises in 2017 and 2018 and only 2% raises in the years following. With the exception of last year, where it was only the 2%, there was a minimum raise of around \$100 a month for some of the years, but that still hasn't been enough to keep Officers afloat or even treading water with normal inflation. That's not even including the recent higher inflation rates due to Covid. With this, it's no surprise we have lost many great Officers and continue to do so as time goes on due to the addition of the stress of working short staffed almost every single day. It has only gotten worse in recent months, while no noticeable action seems to be taken to rectify the issue. At this point, not only has it caused unneeded stress for the Officers, but creates an unsafe condition for those that work here.

It is time to show the Officers working in this profession the respect they deserve by giving them adequate pay. I don't feel we should become rich working this job, but we certainly should not become poorer as time goes on. When I started this profession, I would have never imagined that my years of service would be so underappreciated that I would get raises that leave me making far less than I did when I started 7 years ago, even after I have promoted and received one equity raise after becoming a Sergeant. It is especially important to give adequate raises now, to show the Officers that have stuck out the stressful times of Covid and short staffing that they are actually appreciated.

As a side-effect, this short staffing has also caused the lives of those in custody to be affected in a negative manner. There are often times that we are unable to post some rec areas, sometimes even forcing the residents to remain in their units with no rec in the designated rec areas. This is not fair to them and is likely not good for their physical or mental health, causing even more stress on everyone here.

Being an Officer at the North Dakota State Penitentiary isn't just that, it also requires you to be a mentor, counselor and educator amongst many other things. It is a profession that presents you with challenging situations on an almost daily basis. It's time to invest in the staff here and allow that investment to help make our vision successful.