



PENNSYLVANIA
PRISON SOCIETY
justice & compassion

Warden Clair Doll
York County Prison
3400 Concord Rd
York, PA 17402

April 21, 2021

Dear Warden Doll,

Thank you for your service to York County Prison and your partnership with the Prison Society. We have appreciated working closely with you and your team to resolve issues faced by people in custody. It is in that spirit that we are writing to you today.

Over the past two weeks, we have received multiple calls reporting a deeply troubling incident that occurred at the York County Prison on March 31, 2021. At this point, we understand it was part of a training exercise, although one that we believe was seriously misguided and dangerous. We ask for your and your successor's assurances that similar exercises will not be conducted in the future. At a minimum, we would like written internal policies updated to prohibit using incarcerated people in training like this. We request that the jail review and publicly report on all its training procedures and practices in an effort to both improve readiness and protect incarcerated people and correctional staff. We are happy to connect you with outside experts who may be able to assist with that process. Finally, we ask that the prison address the harm it caused to the people in custody involved in the incident.

We understand that on March 31st, the jail conducted a training exercise that was part of a larger overhaul of the correctional emergency response team procedures. We also understand that the need for this training may have, in part, been spurred by the discovery of an unauthorized knife at the facility.

We realize that there are discrepancies between the version of events shared with our office by people in custody and their families, and what you discussed with our

long-time local volunteer Kathleen Lucas. There is, however, agreement that York County Prison Staff led a training exercise that involved approximately 40 people in custody being removed from their cells, handcuffed, brought to the gymnasium, and made to stand facing a wall for several hours while loaded "less lethal" weapons were pointed at them, and a dog was present.

In addition to these agreed facts, several people who called us made clear that they were not aware that staff were using "less lethal" weapons, but instead, they perceived them to be loaded firearms with live rounds. One person reported being told by an officer that if they moved, the officers would use deadly force and be able to justify it. Multiple people reported being made to stand facing a wall for five hours. It was the perception of one of the incarcerated people who spoke to us that body cameras were not in use, supervising officers were not present, and the dog was unleashed.

We very much appreciate the need of the facility to train staff and improve security. Both of these goals, however, can and usually are accomplished without intentionally placing people in custody in highly threatening, traumatizing, and potentially dangerous situations.

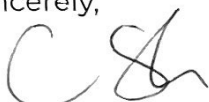
According to Michael R. Resnick, Esq. Commissioner of the Baltimore City Pretrial facilities and former Director of Public Safety for the City of Philadelphia, "security training is vital to a well-run facility. Training exercises, however, typically are performed with staff standing in for people in custody. Using incarcerated people in a training like this can easily go wrong, with devastating consequences. Another vital component of security is a calm prison environment in which staff are respected rather than just feared. Traumatizing people in custody can have negative effects on overall security."

We are deeply concerned for the welfare of the people forced to participate in this incident, their neighbors inside of York County Prison, and their families and loved ones outside of the prison. We are also concerned for the future ability of the facility to meet the needs of individuals incarcerated there.

We appreciate all you have done for the prison and wish you great success in your new position. We urge you and your partners in county leadership to take this as an opportunity to continue moving York County forward. We, the staff at the Prison Society, as well as our local volunteer Official Visitors, are here to help.



Sincerely,



Claire Shubik-Richards
Executive Director

Noah A. Barth



Prison Monitoring Director

Copy:

Adam Ogle, Deputy Warden

Julie Wheeler, President York County Commissioner

Doug Hoke, Vice President York County Commissioner

Ron Smith, York County Commissioner

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