WRITTEN BY STAFF OF WOODBOURNE AND OTTISVILLE CORRECTIONAL ON STRIKE

Subject: Rejection of the Consent Award – Officers Demand Real Change, Not Temporary Fixes

On behalf of the dedicated correction officers who have risked their well-being to uphold the safety and order of our facilities, I am writing to formally reject the proposed Consent Award. This agreement fails to address the root causes of the crisis that led to the strike and instead weaponizes punitive laws against officers, while offering only temporary relief with no meaningful, long-term solutions.

The State's failure to act for over four years is what led to this situation. Officers have endured chronic understaffing, mandatory overtime mandates that break their mental and physical health, and a HALT Act that emboldens inmate violence while stripping officers of necessary tools to maintain order. Rather than acknowledging these failures and committing to a genuine resolution, the State is choosing to punish officers for their desperate call for change by hiding behind the Taylor Law-a law originally intended to protect essential services, not shield the State from accountability when it refuses to act.

1. The State is Weaponizing the Taylor Law Instead of Addressing its Failures

Threatening officers with Taylor Law penalties is neither productive nor just. The State ignored repeated calls for reform, allowing conditions to deteriorate to the point of a strike born from necessity, not desire. Officers did not strike out of defiance; they struck because the State left them no choice.

If the State truly wants stability, it must acknowledge its failures and prioritize real solutions over punitive measures. Otherwise, this agreement only ensures further unrest and future strikes when these same issues inevitably resurface.

2. The 30-Day 2.5x Overtime Pay is Insufficient

The staffing crisis will not be resolved in 30 days, yet this agreement seeks to end enhanced pay after that period, despite knowing officers will continue to be overworked.

-Officers will continue to bear the brunt of understaffing, working excessive hours with no relief.
-The State is relying on officers' dedication to keep facilities running, but refuses to fairly compensate them for their sacrifices.
-The stress and exhaustion that led to this strike will persist beyond 30 days, which means the compensation must persist as well.

Officers demand that the 2.5x overtime pay be extended indefinitely until staffing reaches safe and sustainable levels.

3. HALT Suspension for 90 Days is a Band-Aid, Not a Solution

A temporary pause on HALT-related programming does nothing to fix the problem-it simply delays the inevitable.

-Officers will be placed back in the same dangerous environment once the suspension ends.
-The State is setting itself up for another crisis, rather than developing a permanent reform plan.
-The HALT Act's failures have been clearly demonstrated-why reinstate broken policies instead of fixing them?

Officers demand that HALT-related provisions remain suspended until a full, independent review of its impact is conducted, with meaningful officer input and staffing improvements implemented before reinstatement.

4. The State is Ignoring the Risk of Inmate Retaliation Against Officers

This agreement completely fails to acknowledge the very real and immediate threat of inmate retaliation against officers due to the strike.

-Inmates will view the strike as an opportunity to target officers, knowing staffing remains low and that HALT restrictions are returning.
-There is no clear plan for increased security protections for officers.
-The State is setting officers up to face the consequences of its own failures, rather than protecting them from retaliation.

Officers demand clear commitments from the State on increased security measures, including:
-Mandated full-body scanners to prevent contraband and weapons from entering facilities.
-Mandatory mail screening to eliminate the influx of drugs and illegal items into correctional facilities.
-A zero-tolerance policy for assaults against officers, with clear, immediate, and enforceable consequences for inmates who attack staff. Safety is the officers number one concern.

5. The "Voluntary" Overtime System is Exploitative and Abusive

The current structure of "voluntary" overtime is coercive and deceptive. The State is forcing officers into a false choice: either volunteer for excessive hours or be forced into mandated overtime anyway.
-Officers are being coerced into working 56-hour weeks just to avoid even worse mandatory shifts.
-The policy does not actually reduce forced mandates, as officers can still be required to work a third overtime shift even after volunteering for two- a blatant contradiction to the goal of reducing overwork.
-The $750 penalty payment for excessive mandates is not a solution-the point is for officers to not get stuck working mandatory overtime at all.

This policy is facetious, exploitative, and abusive. If the State were serious about fixing the crisis, it would ensure officers have control over their hours instead of trapping them in a system that forces them into relentless overtime.

Officers demand that the overtime policy be truly voluntary and that forced mandates be significantly reduced, not just financially penalized.

6. Officers Deserve Pension Reform: From Tier 6 to Tier 3

Correction officers put their lives on the line daily, yet the current pension system does not reflect their level of sacrifice.
-Officers demand to move from Tier 6 to Tier 3, which would ensure better retirement security and fair benefits.
-This change would increase retention, reduce burnout, and create a more stable workforce-directly addressing the staffing shortages that led to this crisis in the first place.
If the State truly wants to support officers, it must show real commitment to their long-term well-being,not just short-term fixes.

7. Higher Starting Salary for New Officers

The State must make recruitment more appealing to attract and retain new officers.
-The starting salary for new correction officers is not competitive and fails to reflect the risks and demands of the job.
-Higher starting salaries will incentivize more applicants, reducing the strain on current officers and helping alleviate the staffing crisis.

8. Reinstate Keep Lock to Reduce Inmate Violence

Since the removal of Keep Lock, inmate violence has increased. Officers have lost an essential disciplinary tool, leaving them vulnerable and further destabilizing facilities.

-The lack of consequences emboldens inmates to commit violent acts against staff and other incarcerated individuals.
-Officers need the ability to maintain order and security, and Keep Lock was a crucial tool in that effort.

If the State Truly Wants to Prevent Another Strike, It Must Offer Real Change

This agreement does not address the root causes of officer discontent- it simply postpones the next crisis. The State cannot punish its way out of this crisis; it must propose a contract that includes long-term solutions.

Officers demand:

-A fully negotiated contract that implements staffing increases, fair overtime policies, and HALT reform-not just temporary relief.
-An oversight committee with union representation to monitor and enforce meaningful staffing solutions.
-A commitment to improving officer working conditions, compensation, and security-not just reactionary measures that expire in 30 to 90 days.

Final Position

This agreement does not solve the crisis; it merely delays it. Until the State commits to genuine reforms, the problems that led to this strike will persist-and officers will not stand for that.

We urge the State to return to negotiations with a genuine commitment to long-term solutions. Until then, this agreement cannot be accepted.