



Office of the Correction Ombuds

Semi-Annual Report

Reporting Period: December 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026

Correction Ombuds DeVaughn L. Ward, Esq.

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July 20, 2026

Correction Advisory Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 2500
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Members of the Correction Advisory Committee,

Please find enclosed the Semi-Annual Report of the Office of the Correction Ombuds (OCO) covering the period from December 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026. This report reflects a period in which the office moved from foundational building toward broader statewide operations, expanded investigative capacity, and more consistent public reporting. It also documents continued advancement of individual complaints, systemic oversight, policy reform, and legislative action.

During the reporting period, OCO filled several key positions, established administrative support through the Department of Administrative Services, operationalized its partnership with the University of Connecticut School of Law, and continued developing secure complaint-access points through drop boxes, telephone lines, and a redesigned website. Since the office began cataloging complaints in its case-management system in October 2025, it has received 1,974 complaints. By June 30, 2026, 1,414 matters had been closed through informal resolution, investigation, or another disposition, while 560 remained open and in varying stages of review.

OCO also completed and advanced a substantial body of investigative work. The office issued its first Annual Conditions of Confinement Report, published a focused report concerning the backlog in outpatient specialty medical care, continued subpoena enforcement and contract review involving the Inmate Legal Assistance Program, and advanced its examination of DOC legal costs and settlement expenditures. Individual reports addressed unauthorized and inconsistent strip-search practices and a planned use-of-force incident. The office also continued the J'Allen Jones death investigation, completed two additional in-custody death reviews for anticipated public release, and carried forward a custodial-safety and retaliation review concerning a female housed at York Correctional Institution

The policy-reform section highlights the January 2026 implementation of body-scanning technology at York Correctional Institution and Manson Youth Institution, together with revisions to Administrative Directive 6.7 governing searches. OCO also reviewed DOC's body-worn-camera implementation plan. While the plan recognized the transparency, safety, and accountability benefits of body-worn cameras, the delayed release limited public and legislative review during the 2026 session. The report further identifies the need for competitive procurement and independent cost validation before the State enters a long-term technology agreement.

The 2026 legislative session produced several reforms that will shape OCO's work in the coming year. Public Act 26-40 eliminates correctional health-care fees, strengthens medication continuity and medically necessary care requirements, creates new transparency mechanisms, and establishes a Correction Medical and Health Commission that includes the Ombuds. Public Act 26-10 mandates OCO's independent review of sexual-assault complaints and updates Connecticut's PREA framework. Public Act 26-68 increases OCO's FY 2027 appropriation to \$1,219,274 and supports expansion to ten staff members by the end of 2026.

OCO expanded its public communications during the reporting period. This report identifies numerous print, digital, television, and radio items published between December 1, 2025 and June 30, 2026 in which the office was featured. To further fulfill the office's public-outreach mandate, OCO plans to launch a community town hall series between September and December 2026, with planned stops at libraries and community centers in Hartford, Waterbury, New Haven, New London, and Bridgeport. These events will explain OCO's statutory role, mission, authority, and limitations, and provide members of the public with practical information about how to engage with the office.

Significant work remains. Health services complaints continue to represent the largest category in OCO's case management system. OCO will continue to use facility visits, complaint review, and constructive engagement with DOC and other state partners to promote lawful, safe, humane, and accountable correctional operations.

I appreciate the Advisory Committee's continued partnership and support for independent correctional oversight. I look forward to discussing this report, the office's progress, and the work ahead as OCO continues building the capacity necessary to carry out its statutory mandate.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "DeVaughn L Ward". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "DeVaughn" being more prominent than the last name "Ward".

DeVaughn L. Ward, Esq.
Correction Ombuds

II. Organization Development

During this reporting period, the Office of the Correction Ombuds (OCO) continued to build the staff, administrative infrastructure, and public access points necessary to carry out its expanding oversight responsibilities. The office filled key positions, formalized operational support, expanded its law-student field placement, and developed new systems for complaint intake and public access.

Staffing and Capacity

Since November 30, 2025, OCO has filled all but one authorized position. Teonna Milner joined the office as Office Administrator in December 2025 after serving at Cheshire Correctional Institution. Amy Zipf joined in January 2026 as Assistant Ombuds - Nurse Consultant from UConn Health. Abraham Santiago joined in April 2026 as Associate Ombuds from the University of Connecticut Institute of Municipal and Regional Policy. Teresa Ballestas joined in June 2026 as Clerk Typist from Trinity Healthcare. OCO is currently interviewing candidates for the Special Investigator position, which became vacant in April 2026. During FY 2026-27, the office expects to recruit for three additional positions.

Position	Staff Member	Status / Start
Office Administrator	Teonna Milner	December 2025
Assistant Ombuds - Nurse Consultant	Amy Zipf	January 2026
Associate Ombuds	Abraham Santiago	April 2026
Clerk Typist	Teresa Ballestas	June 2026
Special Investigator	Vacant	Interviews underway
FY 2026-27 Expansion	Three additional positions	Recruitment planned

Administrative Infrastructure

In May 2026, OCO entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Administrative Services (DAS). Under the agreement, DAS will provide personnel, property management, business office, and purchasing support. This arrangement provides OCO with centralized administrative services while allowing office staff to focus resources on complaint response, investigations, facility monitoring, and systemic oversight.

Law Student Field Placement

From January through May 2026, OCO hosted three students from the University of Connecticut School of Law. Their work included research and analysis concerning Security Risk Group designations, Department of Correction litigation and settlement costs, the correctional grievance process, and Prison Rape Elimination Act standards. The placement expanded the office's research capacity while providing students with practical experience in independent correctional oversight. We plan to expand this partnership and host more students in the Spring 2027 semester.

Budget and Resources

For FY 2025-26, OCO received an appropriation of \$796,000 and expended \$456,077.03. The unexpended balance was returned to the General Fund as part of statewide efforts to close the FY 2025-26 budget deficit. For FY 2026-27, OCO's appropriation increased from approximately \$763,000 to \$1.2 million. The additional funding will support planned staffing growth, expanded intake operations, and the infrastructure necessary to carry out the office's statutory responsibilities.

Expanded Complaint Access and Intake

AI-Assisted Intake Pilot

OCO entered into a memorandum of understanding with Atlast to conduct a three-month pilot of an AI-assisted intake hotline at Osborn, MacDougall-Walker, and Cheshire correctional institutions. The pilot is intended to help manage call volume and improve access for incarcerated individuals seeking to submit complaints or inquiries. The tool will support intake alongside OCO administrative staff, while OCO staff remain responsible for triage, review, investigation, and case disposition. The agreement includes privacy and data-protection provisions governing information received through the hotline.

Drop Boxes, Secure Phone Lines, and Facility Posters

With assistance from DOC Correctional Enterprises, OCO has produced secure complaint drop boxes for housing units throughout the correctional system. Once deployed, submissions will be collected by OCO staff on a biweekly schedule. DOC has also assisted the office in establishing a secure telephone line accessible from facility phones. In addition, OCO has developed posters for housing units that explain how to contact the office and submit a complaint. Together, these measures are intended to provide multiple visible and accessible avenues for reaching the Ombuds.

Website Modernization

OCO is working with the Connecticut Bureau of Information Technology Solutions (BITS) to redesign its public website. The updated site will allow users to submit complaints directly through an online form, eliminating the need to download a PDF and send it by email. The site will also include staff profiles, press releases, improved navigation to reports, links to DOC resources, and current facility information. The redesigned website is scheduled to launch on August 4, 2026.

Complaint Intake and Case Resolution

Since OCO began cataloging complaints in its case-management system in October 2025, the office has received 1,974 complaints. As of June 30, 2026, 1,414 complaints had been closed through informal resolution, investigation, or another disposition. The remaining 560 complaints had received an initial response and were in varying stages of review or investigation.

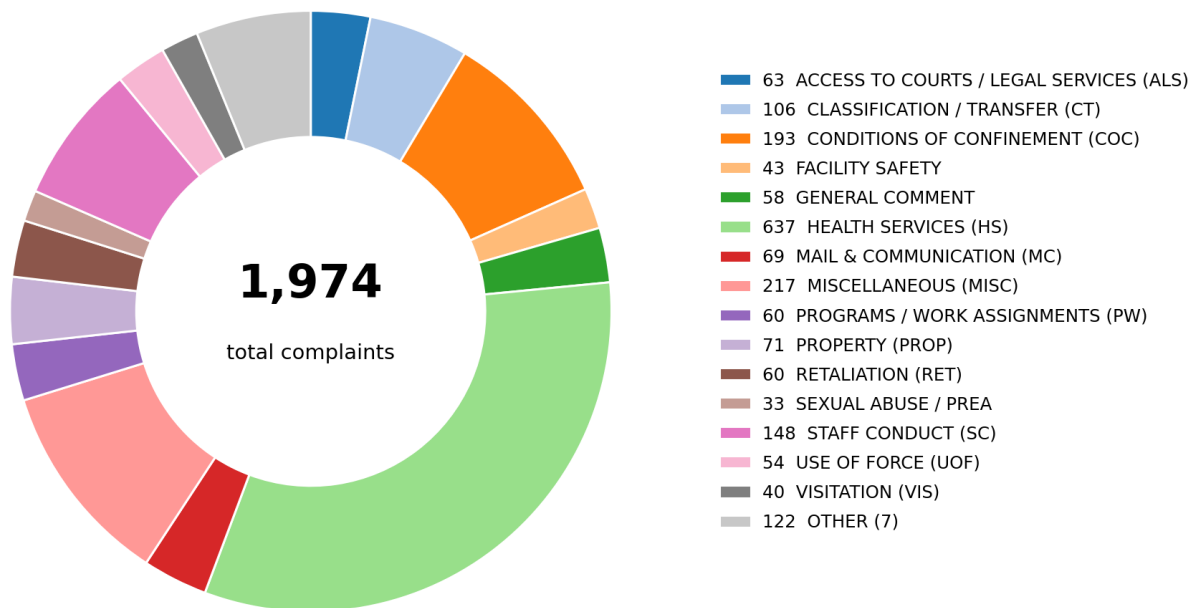


Closed matters represented 71.6% of all complaints entered during the period; 28.4% remained open. Complaint totals reflect cases received, not unique complainants, and the charts below reflect each case's primary category and facility coding in the case-management system.

Distribution by Primary Category

Health services was the largest complaint category, accounting for 637 cases, or 32.3% of all complaints. The next largest categories were miscellaneous matters (217), conditions of confinement (193), staff conduct (148), and classification or transfer concerns (106).

Case Distribution by Primary Category

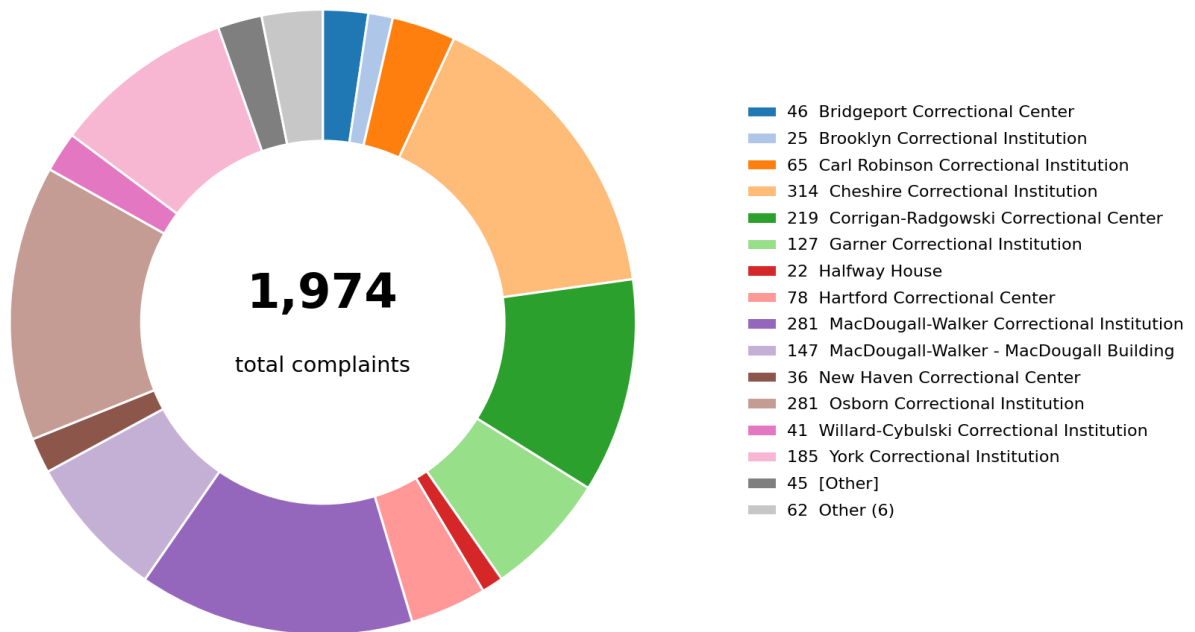


Source: Office of the Correction Ombuds case-management system; cases received through June 30, 2026.

Distribution by Facility

The largest facility totals were associated with Cheshire Correctional Institution (314), MacDougall-Walker Correctional Institution (281), Osborn Correctional Institution (281), Corrigan-Radgowski Correctional Center (219), and York Correctional Institution (185). Facility labels below reflect the coding used in OCO's case-management system during the reporting period.

Case Distribution by Facility



Source: Office of the Correction Ombuds case-management system; cases received through June 30, 2026.

Figures 1-2. Complaints recorded in OCO's case-management system through June 30, 2026.

III. Investigations

During this reporting period, the Office of the Correction Ombuds (OCO) conducted dozens of facility visits statewide and continued to use informal resolution, formal investigation, public reporting, and direct engagement with Department of Correction (DOC) leadership to address individual and systemic concerns. Even as the office continued to expand its staffing and internal capacity, OCO maintained its statutory responsibilities for facility monitoring, transparency, investigation, and public reporting.

Selected Investigative Milestones

Matter	Key Milestone	Status
Heat Mitigation Report	Report issued Oct. 14, 2025; DOC response issued Dec. 2, 2025	Completed
Conditions of Confinement	Annual report issued Jan. 20, 2026; DOC response issued Feb. 20, 2026	Completed
Outpatient Specialty Services	Report issued Mar. 31, 2026; corrective plan and DOC response issued Apr. 2, 2026	Ongoing review
Inmate Legal Assistance Program	Subpoena enforcement, contract review, and evaluation of alternatives	Ongoing review
DOC Legal Costs and Settlements	FOI litigation and supplemental production of financial records	Investigation Completed; Report to be released in Fall 2026.
Lashanda Gregory Custodial Safety Review	Custody, transfer, PREA, retaliation, and current-safety review carried into reporting period	Ongoing review

A. Systemic Investigations and Public Reports

Heat Mitigation and Climate-Control Monitoring

OCO published its Heat Mitigation Report on October 14, 2025, and DOC issued its formal response on December 2, 2025. The report has continued to inform public and media discussion as long-term air-conditioning renovations at Bridgeport Correctional Center and Hartford Correctional Center are not projected to be completed until 2027. OCO continues to monitor conditions at both facilities, as well as at Osborn Correctional Institution, where portable air-conditioning units are being used in certain housing areas but no long-term facility wide climate-control project has been identified.

Annual Conditions of Confinement Report

OCO published its first statutorily mandated annual Conditions of Confinement Report on January 20, 2026. Covering the period from September 1, 2024 through December 31, 2025, the report documented recurring, systemwide deficiencies involving staffing and lockdowns, medical and mental-health care, sanitation and hygiene, food services, legal access, communication, and institutional safety. The report recommended enforceable service-continuity and staffing measures, stronger health-care and environmental safeguards, improved legal and communication access, and sustained legislative and independent oversight. OCO presented the report and received public comment during its semiannual Conditions of Confinement hearing in January 2026. DOC issued its written response on February 20, 2026, and OCO continues to track implementation of the recommendations.

Outpatient Specialty Services Report

On March 31, 2026, OCO published its Report on Access to Outpatient Specialty Services, documenting systemic delays and barriers to medically necessary specialty care. DOC data identified 2,417 pending requests involving 1,613 unique patients; as of March 31, 1,981 requests involving 1,370 patients still required scheduling. In response, DOC and the Office of Policy and Management announced an immediate corrective plan that included validating and prioritizing pending requests, developing a scheduling matrix, expanding targeted clinical capacity, and providing monthly progress updates to OCO. DOC subsequently reported substantial appointment-booking activity. OCO continues to evaluate whether these measures produce timely, sustainable access to specialty care and continuity of treatment.

Inmate Legal Assistance Program Investigation

On July 31, 2025, OCO issued its first subpoenas to Bansley Law LLC, the private law firm contracted to operate the Inmate Legal Assistance Program (ILAP), directing the production of records by August 25, 2025. Bansley objected and did not produce the requested records by the deadline. On October 9, 2025, OCO formally requested that DOC suspend the contract until the firm complied. After production remained outstanding, OCO filed a petition in Hartford Superior Court on October 31, 2025, seeking enforcement of the subpoenas.

In December 2025, Bansley produced materials responsive to the subpoena, and OCO referred its contract-compliance concerns to the State Contracting Standards Board. On December 17, 2025, the Board formally acknowledged OCO's request and advised that it had authorized staff to engage with DOC, the Office of the Attorney General, OCO, and other necessary parties to gather information and determine appropriate next steps. On February 4, 2026, the Hartford Superior Court overruled Bansley's objection to OCO's subpoena.

Throughout the reporting period, OCO also engaged DOC leadership and the Office of Policy and Management regarding alternatives for delivering legal assistance and legal research resources to incarcerated people. DOC renewed the existing ILAP contract for one year rather than the prior two-year term while alternatives are evaluated. In May 2026, a legal-resource application was temporarily added to incarcerated persons' tablets and later removed for additional security review and troubleshooting. On June 12, 2026, DOC advised tablet users that it was continuing to evaluate legal-resource applications and that ILAP services would remain available during the review. OCO's investigation will remain open while statewide alternatives and supplemental legal resources are evaluated and implemented.

Investigation into DOC Legal Costs and Settlement Expenditures

OCO continued its investigation into DOC's legal costs associated with settlements and litigation, prompted by concerns regarding transparency and the fiscal impact of repeated claims of misconduct. The office sought records from DOC and the Office of the Attorney General, including invoices, settlement agreements, and expense summaries. The Attorney General's Office initially objected to producing several categories of records and maintained that certain settlement information had already been disclosed through prior spreadsheets. Subsequent subpoenas and public reporting, however, identified additional settlements and legal expenditures that had not been included in the original production.

These discrepancies resulted in a contested Freedom of Information proceeding in which OCO submitted supplemental exhibits identifying gaps in the agencies' disclosures. On April 21, 2026, the Freedom of Information Commission issued Decision FIC 2025-0261 finding that the Attorney General's Office violated portions of the Connecticut Freedom of Information Act in connection with the disclosure of certain settlement records. The decision was affirmed on May 15, 2026. OCO is in the process of reviewing the records produced in response to the decision and related proceedings.

Post-Reporting-Period Update: On July 15, 2026, the Attorney General's Office produced an additional collection of invoices and related documents. OCO anticipates completing a final public report during fall 2026.

B. Individual Investigations and Reports

Unauthorized and Inconsistent Strip-Search Practices at York Correctional Institution

On April 1, 2026, OCO published its Report on Unauthorized and Inconsistent Strip Search Practices at York Correctional Institution concerning the May 5, 2025 strip searches of Michelle Troconis. OCO found that the strip search conducted before her contact visit was inconsistent with Administrative Directive 6.7. Facility records showed that the institutional count had already cleared within the Admitting and Discharge area, although Main Control did not announce the clearance until several minutes later. Under those circumstances, Ms. Troconis being considered “out of place” did not establish reasonable suspicion, and DOC did not produce documentation identifying specific, articulable facts supporting the search. The post visit strip search, by contrast, was consistent with the version of the directive then in effect. The investigation also identified inconsistencies in DOC’s internal review and raised concerns that invasive searches could be applied inconsistently or selectively.

OCO recommended clearer limits on strip searches, contemporaneous documentation and supervisory review, trauma-informed training and accountability, further review of potential systemic and PREA related concerns, appropriate corrective action, and statewide expansion of body scanning technology. In its May 1, 2026 response, DOC agreed with statewide implementation of body scanners and reported that a revised Administrative Directive 6.7, effective January 16, 2026, now directs staff to use the least invasive search method when circumstances permit and clarifies the authorized sequence of search methods and documentation requirements. DOC stated that York’s review of five years of incident reports indicated the matter was isolated, accepted the recommendation for enhanced training, and reported that York issued an April 15 roll call notice emphasizing professional, respectful, and policy-compliant searches. DOC also advised that the incident had been referred to the Director of Security and remained under investigation. OCO will continue monitoring completion of that investigation, implementation of training and policy changes, and expansion of body-scanning technology.

Lashanda Gregory Custodial Safety and Retaliation Review

OCO carried into this reporting period an individual review concerning Lashanda Gregory, an incarcerated woman who was sexually assaulted by two former correctional officers while housed at York Correctional Institution and was later transferred to an out of state correctional facility. In November 2025, members of the General Assembly raised concerns regarding Ms. Gregory's safety, potential retaliation, the effect of her transfer on access to family and counsel, and the State's response to her civil claim. The underlying assaults and the initiation of the civil proceedings predated the reestablishment of OCO and the current Ombuds' tenure.

In response, the office initiated a review focused on Ms. Gregory's custody and transfer history, PREA related records and potential retaliation. No final findings have been issued, and the custodial-safety review remains ongoing.

Planned Use of Force at Carl Robinson Correctional Institution

On June 1, 2026, OCO published its report concerning the May 1, 2025 planned use of force incident involving Richard Benson at Carl Robinson Correctional Institution. The investigation found significant deficiencies in the planning and execution of the operation, including the initiation of force in a populated open dormitory, attempted physical retrieval of suspected contraband from Mr. Benson's mouth, deployment of chemical agent near uninvolved individuals, and inadequate documentation of his medical condition before placement in restrictive housing. DOC submitted a written response dated June 29, 2026. The Department agreed to review its planning procedures, documentation requirements, training materials, and guidance concerning nerve compression techniques and manual body-cavity searches, but stated that potential policy violations, corrective action, and reconsideration of Mr. Benson's disciplinary sanctions would remain under review pending completion of its internal investigation. OCO continues to monitor that investigation and the Department's implementation of the accepted recommendations.

J'Allen Jones Death Investigation

OCO continued its independent investigation into the 2018 death of J'Allen Jones at Garner Correctional Institution. The office reviewed disciplinary histories and personnel files of staff involved in the incident and its aftermath, together with incident reports, medical and mental health records, recorded interviews, and other documentary evidence. In November 2025, the Ombuds completed a full review of the unedited video depicting the events leading to Mr. Jones's death and the death itself. The investigation remains ongoing.

Additional In-Custody Death Investigations

OCO completed investigative reviews of two additional in-custody deaths during this reporting period. To protect the integrity of the release process and provide appropriate notice, the individuals' names are not included in this semiannual report. Public findings concerning both matters are anticipated in July 2026.

Facility / Incident	Investigation Status	Public Report Status
MacDougall-Walker Correctional Institution - December 2024	Investigation completed	Public findings anticipated July 2026; name withheld pending release
York Correctional Institution - December 2025	Investigation completed	Public findings anticipated July 2026; name withheld pending release

IV. Policy Reforms

During this reporting period, the Office of the Correction Ombuds (OCO) continued to translate investigative findings and statutory advocacy into concrete policy reforms. The office focused particularly on reducing reliance on invasive searches, modernizing correctional security technology, strengthening documentation and oversight, and advancing an objective video record of critical incidents. The principal developments involved the implementation of body-scanning technology, revision of Administrative Directive 6.7, and review of the Department of Correction's plan for body-worn cameras.

Body Scanner Implementation and Search-Policy Reform

On January 16, 2026, DOC placed four full body scanners into operation—two at York Correctional Institution and two at Manson Youth Institution. DOC reported that nearly 4,000 scans were completed during the first six weeks of operation, reducing reliance on strip searches while maintaining a method for detecting contraband. OCO continues to monitor implementation at both facilities and has advocated for expansion of the technology to the remaining correctional facilities statewide.

The scanner rollout coincided with a substantial revision of Administrative Directive 6.7, Searches Conducted in Correctional Facilities. The revised directive added body scanner definitions and operating procedures, established a process following a positive scan, updated pat search and strip search provisions, incorporated video recording and Prison Rape Elimination Act standards, added dry cell placement procedures, and clarified that DOC does not authorize manual body cavity searches. The directive also provides transport to an outside hospital when health services staff determine that suspected concealed contraband may endanger an incarcerated person's life.

These changes address several concerns identified through OCO's policy review and its investigation of the unauthorized pre visit strip search of Michelle Troconis at York. The implementation of less intrusive technology and clearer policy standards represents meaningful progress. OCO will continue evaluating whether staff receive consistent training; whether searches are supported by adequate justification and documentation; whether supervisory review is meaningful; and whether body-scanner practices are applied consistently across populations and facilities.

Body-Worn Camera Planning and Legislative Follow-Up

Public Act 25-161 amended Connecticut General Statutes § 18-81nn to require the Commissioner of Correction to develop a plan for implementing body-worn recording equipment by January 1, 2026, and to report that plan to the General Assembly's relevant committees by February 1, 2026. OCO received DOC's Body Worn Cameras Report on April 8, 2026. By that time, most committee deadlines for the 2026 legislative session had passed, substantially limiting the opportunity for public testimony, committee review, and legislative action during the session.

DOC's report recognized that body-worn cameras could improve safety, accountability, transparency, and operational efficiency by creating a consistent and objective record of correctional operations and critical incidents. The preliminary proposal contemplated deployment across 13 correctional facilities, five parole district offices, the Correctional Transportation Unit, and two canine units. DOC estimated a twelve to eighteen-month implementation period and identified significant additional needs involving broadband and facility infrastructure, evidence management, redaction, training, equipment maintenance, labor relations, and personnel.

DOC Preliminary Body-Worn Camera Estimate

The estimated \$19.5 million annual and \$194.9 million ten-year costs identified by DOC cover the proposed equipment, software, storage, technical support, and training contract. DOC further advised that additional expenditures would be required for facility improvements and the personnel necessary to issue, maintain,

preserve, review, and redact the resulting footage. These costs and operational considerations require careful public review, but they do not eliminate the substantial oversight and safety benefits acknowledged in DOC's own report.

Competitive Procurement and Alternative Vendor Estimate

DOC did not conduct a competitive solicitation or seek alternative vendor proposals before issuing its body-worn camera plan. The plan relied on pricing associated with an existing state contract on which Axon is the sole vendor. Because OCO did not receive the report until April 8, 2026 - more than two months after the statutory reporting deadline and after most legislative committee deadlines had passed. OCO, policymakers, potential vendors, and other stakeholders did not have a timely opportunity to test the cost assumptions through an open public or competitive process.

After the report was released, OCO received correspondence on behalf of Motorola Solutions, Inc. stating that the company had reviewed the requirements described in DOC's report and could offer a ten-year program for 2,171 body-worn cameras at a substantially lower price. Motorola represented that its proposal included advanced evidence-management and artificial-intelligence tools, three comprehensive hardware refreshes, and long-term support comparable to the features described in the Axon estimate.

Cost Source	Ten-Year Estimate	Qualification
DOC / Axon preliminary estimate	\$194,930,036	Estimate stated in DOC report; based on sole-vendor state-contract pricing.
Motorola Solutions vendor estimate	\$30,850,000	Unsolicited vendor estimate for 2,171 cameras; not independently validated by OCO.
Potential difference	\$164,080,036	Potential savings claimed by vendor; subject to competitive procurement and technical review.

OCO has not independently verified that the two proposals are equivalent in every material respect, and the Motorola figure should not be treated as a final procurement price. The scale of the asserted difference, however, demonstrates the need for a transparent, competitive procurement, independent technical review, and a complete lifecycle-cost analysis before the State enters a long-term body-worn camera agreement. A public hearing would allow DOC, labor, oversight entities, vendors, advocates, and legislators to evaluate costs, capabilities, privacy safeguards, evidence access, staffing, and implementation requirements on a complete record.

OCO will continue working with policymakers, DOC, labor representatives, advocates, vendors, and other stakeholders to evaluate a responsible implementation framework. OCO intends to advocate for the proposal to receive a public hearing during the 2027 legislative session.

V. Legislative Update

The 2026 legislative session produced several significant reforms affecting health care, mental health care, sexual-assault prevention, food and commissary oversight, reentry, and the capacity of the Office of the Correction Ombuds (OCO). Many of these measures respond directly to complaint trends, facility observations, and systemic concerns documented by OCO and raised by incarcerated people, families, advocates, and other members of Connecticut's correctional community.

OCO's legislative work during the reporting period focused on strengthening independent oversight, improving continuity and transparency in correctional health care, ensuring that sexual assault complaints receive outside review, and securing the staffing and operational resources necessary for the office to carry out its statutory mandate. The principal enacted measures and significant unfinished legislation are summarized below.

2026 Legislative Session Highlights

Measure	Status	Principal Impact
Public Act 26-40	Signed May 26, 2026	Broad correctional health-care reforms; elimination of medical fees; medication, food, commissary, and oversight provisions.
Public Act 26-10	Effective July 1, 2026	Updates Connecticut PREA standards and expands OCO access to sexual-assault reports and complaints.
Public Act 26-68	FY 2026-27 budget adjustment	Raises OCO's FY 2027 appropriation to \$1,219,274 and supports expansion to ten staff members.
Public Act 26-96	Effective October 1, 2026	Creates a clearer address-verification process and limited protections for circumstances beyond a registrant's control.
Senate Bill 503	Passed Senate 24-12; no House vote	Would have expanded young-adult parole eligibility and required courts to consider developmental science at sentencing.

Public Act 26-40 - Correctional Health Care and Oversight

Governor Ned Lamont signed House Bill 5567 into law as Public Act 26-40 on May 26, 2026, following overwhelming bipartisan passage. The Act is one of the most comprehensive correctional health-care reform measures enacted in Connecticut in recent years. It addresses medical fees, access to medically necessary care, medication continuity, electronic health records, mental health oversight, food and commissary operations, and the relationship between DOC's grievance process and independent review by OCO.

Beginning July 1, 2026, DOC may no longer charge incarcerated people for medical, dental, mental health, optometry, specialty, emergency, follow-up, device, or laboratory services, and outstanding balances related to prior health-care charges must be canceled. Beginning October 1, 2026, the Act requires timely and clinically appropriate access to medically necessary procedures, written documentation when care is delayed or denied, English and Spanish language medical rights notices, medication verification at intake, and development of an electronic health record system that supports digitally logged and time stamped requests for care.

The Act also requires a list of time critical medications, including medications for diabetes, seizure disorders, cardiac conditions, serious mental illness, and medication-assisted treatment. DOC must establish timing windows, escalation procedures, and lockdown protocols, and must document missed or delayed doses. By January 1, 2027, DOC must update its health-care plan to prevent interruption of clinically necessary medication at intake and provide same-day access when a needed medication is unavailable at the receiving facility.

Oversight and Accountability Provisions

Public Act 26-40 materially strengthens OCO's oversight capacity. It clarifies that an incarcerated person does not have to file or complete a DOC grievance before contacting OCO and that OCO may not condition review of a complaint on exhaustion of the Department's grievance process. It also expressly authorizes the Ombuds to bring and use state issued electronic communication devices, including a state-issued cell phone, while performing official duties inside correctional facilities. This authority improves OCO's ability to document conditions observed during facility visits.

By January 1, 2027, OCO must hire a Correction Mental Health Care Clinician to review and assist with mental health care complaints. OCO will also receive quarterly facility level medical staffing scorecards beginning in 2027, including vacancy rates, time-to-fill information, reliance on temporary staff, and medical staff suspensions or terminations. These provisions will allow the office to evaluate whether staffing shortages are contributing to delayed or interrupted care.

Food, Commissary, and System Planning

The Act directs the Auditors of Public Accounts to examine DOC's nutrition, food service, therapeutic diet, and commissary programs, including meal quality, nutritional adequacy, cost efficiency, irregularities, pricing, product availability, and complaint patterns. The audit report is due July 15, 2027, and DOC must submit a corrective action plan by January 11, 2028. These requirements respond to recurring concerns documented in OCO's 2025 Conditions of Confinement Report and in complaints received throughout the reporting period.

Public Act 26-40 also establishes the Correction Medical and Health Commission, on which the Correction Ombuds serves. The Commission must develop a ten year plan for correctional health care, behavioral health, nutrition, and related services by January 1, 2027. It includes state officials and members with expertise in correctional medicine, public health, behavioral health, reentry, health-care finance, pharmacy, nursing, nutrition, and lived experience.

Public Act 26-68 - Budget and Organizational Capacity

Public Act 26-68, the state budget adjustment act for the biennium ending June 30, 2027, increased OCO's FY 2027 appropriation from \$763,692 to \$1,219,274. The \$455,582 increase represents approximately 59.7 percent additional funding and supports the office's planned expansion from six staff members, including the Ombuds, to ten staff members by the end of 2026.

\$763,692 PRIOR FY 2027 APPROPRIATION	\$1,219,274 REVISED FY 2027 APPROPRIATION	\$455,582 INCREASE IN STATE FUNDING	10 PLANNED STAFF BY END OF 2026
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The increased appropriation will strengthen OCO's capacity. The investment also reflects recognition of the office's necessity and efficacy.

Public Act 26-10 - Prison Rape Elimination Standards

Public Act 26-10 updates Connecticut law to reflect federal Prison Rape Elimination Act standards in effect as of January 1, 2024. Effective July 1, 2026, any report or complaint of sexual assault in a DOC facility must be transmitted to OCO, and incarcerated people, family members, advocates, and others may report sexual assault concerns directly to the office. This requirement ensures that allegations do not remain solely within DOC's internal reporting system and creates a formal role for independent review.

The Act also requires immediate and ongoing access to sexual assault crisis services, establishes a duty to intervene, strengthens trauma-informed training for medical and mental health staff, and reinforces protections concerning retaliation, cross-gender viewing and searches, confidential support, third-party reporting, investigations, incident review, and data collection. By January 1, 2027, DOC must adopt implementing

regulations and begin annual reporting to the Judiciary Committee concerning PREA training, complaints, investigations, and outcomes.

Other Legislation Affecting Reentry

Public Act 26-96 revises Connecticut's address verification process for people subject to sex crimes registration requirements. Effective October 1, 2026, proof of residency may be submitted by mail, fax, email, or in person; the law identifies additional acceptable documents, clarifies deadlines and return instructions, and establishes a limited affirmative defense when circumstances beyond a person's control prevent compliance and the person becomes compliant within the statutory period. These changes are particularly relevant to people returning to the community who may face housing instability, limited documentation, or other reentry barriers.

Unfinished Business - Senate Bill 503

Senate Bill 503 would have expanded certain parole eligibility and sentencing provisions to people who were under twenty-six years old when their offenses were committed. The bill passed the Senate by a vote of 24-12 but did not receive a final vote in the House and therefore did not become law.

The bill would not have guaranteed release. It would have created eligibility for a parole hearing for certain people serving lengthy sentences, required consideration of rehabilitation and public safety, and directed sentencing courts to consider scientific and psychological evidence concerning young-adult development. It also would have required presentence reports and Judicial Branch reference materials addressing those developmental factors. OCO will continue to monitor and participate in policy discussions if similar legislation is considered during the 2027 session.

Selected Implementation Deadlines

Date	Major Requirements
Upon passage	Correction Medical and Health Commission established; time-critical medication work begins; OCO device authority and complaint-process clarification take effect; food and commissary audit process begins.
July 1, 2026	Health-care fees prohibited and prior balances canceled; updated PREA requirements and transmission of sexual-assault reports to OCO take effect.
October 1, 2026	Medical-rights notices, medication verification at intake, medically necessary care protections, electronic health-record requirements, medication self-administration pilot, and Public Act 26-96 address-verification reforms begin.
January 1, 2027	OCO mental health clinician required; medication-continuity requirements and quarterly staffing scorecards begin; Commission ten-year plan due; PREA regulations and annual reporting begin.
July 15, 2027	Food-service and commissary audit report due.
October 1, 2027	York discharge-planning and care-coordination pilot begins.
January 2028	Medication self-administration pilot report and DOC food/commissary corrective-action plan due.

OCO will monitor implementation of these enactments through continued engagement with DOC, the General Assembly, affected communities, and other oversight partners.

VI. Outreach and Communications

Public education and community engagement are statutorily mandated and essential components of independent correctional oversight. During the reporting period of December 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026, the Office of the Correction Ombuds (OCO) provided interviews, commentary, and background information to journalists covering major developments within Connecticut's correctional system.

Coverage during this period addressed OCO's Conditions of Confinement Report, access to specialty medical care, the Inmate Legal Assistance Program, deaths in custody, uses of force, strip search practices, contraband controls, DOC leadership, and implementation of legislative reforms. Correction Ombuds DeVaughn Ward served as the office's principal public spokesperson, while Assistant Ombuds - Nurse Consultant Amy Zipf provided clinical and health systems expertise in reporting concerning delayed specialty care.

Print and Digital Coverage

Date	Outlet	Coverage Area	Title
Dec. 4, 2025	CT Mirror	In-custody death	Officials: Man Who Assaulted Correction Officer Died by Suicide
Dec. 4, 2025	Hearst Connecticut Media / CT Insider	In-custody death	CT Prison Inmate Accused of Attacking Female Guard Dies by Suicide, Officials Say
Dec. 4, 2025	Hearst Connecticut Media / CT Insider	Use of force and records access	CT Ombudsman Threatens to Sue DOC for Info on Alleged Assault by Guards That Severely Injured Inmate
Jan. 17, 2026	Hartford Courant	DOC audit, health care, and deaths in custody	Lawmakers Question DOC Leaders After Audit, Recent Deaths
Jan. 20, 2026	CT Mirror	Conditions of Confinement Report	CT Correction Ombuds Details "Institutional Failure" in Prison Conditions Report
Jan. 20, 2026	Hearst Connecticut Media / CT Insider	Conditions of Confinement Report	"Recurring Failures" in CT Prison System Threaten Health, Safety of Inmates and Staff, Report Says
Jan. 20, 2026	CT Examiner	Conditions of Confinement Report	Report Claims "Sustained Institutional Failure" in Connecticut Prisons
Jan. 21, 2026	CT Examiner	Staffing and lockdowns	Little Motivation to Correct "Understaffing" in Connecticut's Prisons
Feb. 26, 2026	Hearst Connecticut Media / CT Insider	DOC leadership	Connecticut Prison Commissioner Announces Retirement
Feb. 28, 2026	CT Examiner	Inmate Legal Assistance Program	No Vindication for the Inmate Legal Assistance Program in Its Response
Mar. 3, 2026	CT Examiner	Inmate Legal Assistance Program	A Conflict of Interest at the Heart of Inmate Legal Assistance in Connecticut
Mar. 12, 2026	Hearst Connecticut Media / CT Insider	DOC leadership	Lamont Names Interim Leader for Connecticut Prisons Amid DOC Criticism
Mar. 12, 2026	CT Mirror	DOC leadership	Sharonda Carlos Tapped to Lead Department of Correction
Mar. 30, 2026	Hartford Courant	Correctional health care reform and deaths in custody	After 9 Deaths, CT Legislators Push to Improve Prisons: DOC "Has Got to Get Its Act Together"
Apr. 1, 2026	Hearst Connecticut Media / CT Insider	Outpatient specialty medical care	Inside Connecticut Prisons, People Wait Years for Medical Care, Records Show
Apr. 6, 2026	Hearst Connecticut Media / CT Insider	Outpatient specialty medical care	CT DOC Officials to Fast-Track Inmate Specialty Care Following Critical Ombudsman Report
Apr. 6, 2026	Hearst Connecticut Media / CT Insider	Strip-search practices at York	Michelle Troconis Strip-Search Violated Connecticut Prison Policy, Report Says
Apr. 29, 2026	Hearst Connecticut Media / CT Insider	Health care at York	In First Interview, Michelle Troconis Talks About the Lack of Healthcare for Incarcerated Women
May 1, 2026	Prison Legal News	Conditions of Confinement Report	Connecticut Correction Ombuds Finds DOC in "Sustained Institutional Failure"
May 4, 2026	Hearst Connecticut Media / CT Insider	Strip-search practices at York	CT DOC Employee Who Strip Searched Michelle Troconis Under Investigation, Official Said
May 19, 2026	CT Mirror	Correctional health care reform	CT Department of Correction Plans to Address Healthcare Delays
May 19, 2026	Hearst Connecticut Media / CT Insider	DOC leadership and health care oversight	After Years of Short-Staffing and Lawsuits, CT Prison System to See New Leadership, Oversight

Date	Outlet	Coverage Area	Title
June 4, 2026	Corrections1	Planned use of force / Richard Benson	COs Used Excessive Force in Contraband Search, Conn. Ombudsman Says
June 5, 2026	Hearst Connecticut Media / CT Insider	Planned use of force / Richard Benson	CT Prison Guards Used Too Much Force While Investigating Possible Contraband, Report Says
June 5, 2026	Hearst Connecticut Media / CT Insider	Staff safety and use-of-force review	Inmate at Cheshire Prison Arrested in Attack That Injured Multiple Guards
June 26, 2026	CT Examiner	J'Allen Jones video release	Court Releases Footage of J'Allen Jones' Death After 8-Year Legal Battle
June 26, 2026	CT Mirror	J'Allen Jones video release	CT DOC Video Shows Man Wheezing, Begging for Water Before His Death
June 26, 2026	Hearst Connecticut Media / CT Insider	J'Allen Jones video release	Video Shows Events Surrounding CT Inmate's Death
June 30, 2026	Hearst Connecticut Media / CT Insider	Planned use of force / Richard Benson	Connecticut DOC Won't Reconsider Inmate Discipline Until Investigation Ends

Television Coverage

Date	Outlet	Coverage Area	Title
Dec. 5, 2025	NBC Connecticut	In-custody death	Correction Ombuds Speaks Following Death of Inmate Accused of Attacking Officer
Jan. 20, 2026	NBC Connecticut	Conditions of Confinement Report	Report on Connecticut's Corrections Facilities Finds "Sustained Institutional Failure," Calls for Legislative Oversight
Jan. 21, 2026	WTNH News 8	Conditions of Confinement Report	CT Prisons Running in State of "Institutional Failure"
Jan. 29, 2026	WTNH News 8	Conditions of Confinement public hearing	"I Am Scared": Friends, Family Voice Concern for Inmates Following Report on Connecticut Prisons
Feb. 24, 2026	News 12 Connecticut	OCO statutory role and oversight	Power & Politics: CT Comptroller Sean Scanlon Announces Reelection Bid
Feb. 27, 2026	NBC Connecticut	DOC response to Conditions of Confinement Report	CT Department of Correction Issues Report in Response to Operation Concerns
June 26, 2026	WTNH News 8	J'Allen Jones video release	Video of Inmate Who Died at Hands of Correction Officers in 2018 Released

Radio and Podcast Coverage

Date	Outlet	Coverage Area	Title
Dec. 23, 2025	Connecticut Public	Body-worn camera legislation	Here Are Some of the CT Laws Making Changes as 2026 Arrives
Jan. 20, 2026	Connecticut Public	Conditions of Confinement Report	Connecticut Prisons in "Sustained Institutional Failure," Watchdog Report Finds
Jan. 21, 2026	WTIC NewsTalk 1080	Conditions of Confinement Report and OCO oversight	Guest DeVaughn Ward Joins Reese to Talk Corrections Audit - 1-21-26 Hr 2
Feb. 2, 2026	Connecticut Public	Conditions of Confinement public hearing	Advocates, Incarcerated People Speak Out About CT Prison Conditions Following Ombuds Report
Apr. 1, 2026	Connecticut Public	Outpatient specialty medical care	Watchdog Finds More Than 1,500 People in CT Prisons Stuck in Backlog for Specialty Care
May/June 2026	CT Examiner	Correctional oversight and legislative reform	Podcast Interview with Correction Ombuds DeVaughn Ward and Sen. Gary Winfield

Public Communication Impact

The breadth of coverage reflects growing public interest in independent correctional oversight. Media engagement allowed OCO to explain its findings in context, distinguish individual incidents from systemic concerns, respond to DOC actions, and communicate directly with incarcerated people, families, correctional staff, policymakers, advocates, and the broader public. It also provided an avenue for Amy Zipf to translate complex health-care data into understandable information about wait times, clinical risk, continuity of care, and system accountability.

OCO will continue to engage with journalists while protecting confidential information, respecting the dignity of affected individuals and families, and ensuring that public statements remain grounded in the office's independent review of records, facility observations, complaints, and applicable legal and policy standards.

Fall 2026 Community Town Hall Series

Between September and December 2026, OCO plans to launch a community town hall series with stops at public libraries and community centers in Hartford, Waterbury, New Haven, New London, and Bridgeport. The series will advance the office's public outreach responsibilities by bringing information about correctional oversight directly into communities across the state.

Each town hall will provide an accessible overview of OCO's statutory role, mission, authority, and limitations; explain how incarcerated people, family members, advocates, correctional staff, and other members of the public may contact and engage with the office; share information about current initiatives and complaint trends; and create an opportunity for questions, feedback, and community dialogue. Final dates, venues, and registration information will be announced as arrangements are completed.

City	Anticipated Venue	Planned Window	Status
Hartford	Public library or community center	September–December 2026	To be announced
Waterbury	Public library or community center	September–December 2026	To be announced
New Haven	Public library or community center	September–December 2026	To be announced
New London	Public library or community center	September–December 2026	To be announced
Bridgeport	Public library or community center	September–December 2026	To be announced