



**NEWS:**

## **Report Notes Progress in Fixing Prison System Woes**

### ***- Staffing Shortages, Forced Overtime Still Issues -***

**July 20, 2018** -- This week, state officials took two steps intended to move past the James T. Vaughn Correctional Center (JTVCC) prison riot early last year, which led to the taking of hostages and the murder of Correctional Officer Lt. Steven Floyd.

On Monday, Delaware Corrections Commissioner Perry Phelps [announced](#) C Building, which was the site of the February 1-2, 2017 inmate uprising, would be demolished. It previously housed up to 135 medium-security inmates but has been vacant since the end of the incident.

"The presence of C Building at JTVCC only serves as a constant reminder of the tragedy ... that senselessly took the life of one of our family members," said Commissioner Phelps. "Demolishing the building will serve as a point forward in the healing process and enable the staff at JTVCC to become stronger and stronger as each new day passes."

The demolition is expected to begin this fall.

On Tuesday, Department of Correction (DOC) officials released [a report](#) indicating the agency had "measurably addressed" 40 of the 41 recommendations made by an independent review of security issues in the wake of the riot.

Among the positive progress cited in the report is that correctional officers are receiving additional training, staff communications have improved, and hundreds of cameras have been installed throughout Vaughn Correctional Center.

However, chronic correctional officer staffing shortages, and a reliance on forced overtime to secure the state's prison system, remain significant problems. According to the report, there are presently 227 correctional officer vacancies statewide. The Department of Correction paid nearly \$31 million in overtime alone in the fiscal year that concluded June 30.



State Rep. Steve Smyk

Steps are being taken to address the problems. In the new state operating budget that took effect July 1, the annual starting salary for correctional officers was raised to \$43,000. DOC officials said they have also stepped-up their recruiting efforts and are implementing policies to decrease the overtime burden on existing officers.

State Rep. Steve Smyk, R-Milton-Lewes, has been a proponent of improved prison security and working conditions for correctional staffers, predating the riot.

"We don't just need bodies; we need motivated individuals who will augment the ranks of the quality men and women we already have in place," Rep. Smyk said. "Getting the C-Os up to full authorized staffing levels will not be a quick process. It is going to take some time. The General Assembly needs to continue to monitor the progress of corrections' system improvements, and work with the agency and the governor to ensure this positive momentum continues."