

AFSCME Corrections United

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Governor Shuts Down Maryland House of Correction



Tiffany Ricci

Gov. Martin O'Malley announces the closure of the Maryland House of Correction at a press conference on March 19. To his right are CO Bernard Ralph, Local 1678 president, and Lt. Gov. Anthony Brown.

T rue to his promise, newly elected Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) acted on the concerns by Maryland corrections officers (COs) during his campaign last year. He shut down the state's most dangerous prison — an 840-inmate facility that had been the site of repeated violence over the years, including the fatal slaying of two COs in the last 15 months.

On March 19, after meeting with AFSCME Council 92 — following another stabbing two weeks earlier — O'Malley officially closed the Maryland House of Correction (HOC) in Jessup. Known as “the Cut” because of railroad tracks dissecting the countryside nearby, the name eventually referred to the fre-

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COs & Law Enforcement Officers Lobby for a Collective Bargaining Bill

With friends of working families controlling the U.S. Congress, passage of a collective bargaining bill for public safety officers looks promising. Authored by U.S. Rep. Dale Kildee (D-Mich.), the Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act would require all 50 states to provide a mechanism for collective bargaining rights for all corrections officers, police, firefighters and EMTs.

Nearly six years ago, a similar bill was introduced, and almost passed, following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Despite a strong effort by Democrats, who argued that public safety officers had earned the right to form unions and bargain for better pay, Republican leadership blocked the measure from coming to a vote in the Senate.

“Over the years, Congress has expanded the scope of these laws to

cover private-sector employees, nonprofit association employees, transportation workers, federal government employees and — most recently — congressional employees,” says President McEntee. “The only major category of workers not covered by federal laws is state and local government employees like public safety officers.”

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quent violence that occurred inside.

"I always felt like we were in a race against time to get our corrections officers and the inmates out of this facility before another stabbing or, God forbid, another murder happened," O'Malley said at a press conference.

"The governor not only listened, but acted decisively," says Sue Esty, Council 92 interim executive director. "His immediate actions are unprecedented. It is a wonderful change from the last four years where corrections staff were

ignored. Too many COs and inmates have been harmed in this facility. The time is long past to stop the bleeding."

Local 1678 Pres. Bernard Ralph, a lieutenant at the Maryland Correctional Institution in Jessup, is also pleased with the governor's prompt action. "When one of our COs was gunned down last year, we expected Gov. Robert Ehrlich [R] to once and for all act on our demands," he says. "Prison safety was a major issue for us and we've been calling attention to it for more than 10

years. We're heartened that Governor O'Malley followed through with his campaign promise."

Meanwhile, corrections officers from HOC are being placed at other Jessup prisons. "This change has the added benefit of increasing staffing at other facilities that have severe problems, including too much mandatory overtime," adds Ralph. "We are very happy that the corrections division is not only filling vacancies but also adding necessary new posts to be filled at the Jessup Correctional Institution." ●

Collective Bargaining

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"We care deeply about our jobs."

— Council 15 Exec. Director

Jim Howell

To map out a plan to win passage of this measure, several AFSCME members who work in public safety met in Washington, D.C., in February. "We deserve basic workplace protections," says Council 15 Exec. Dir. Jim Howell who chairs the initiative. "We risk our lives every day because we care deeply about our jobs."

COs are optimistic about the bill's passage this time around. "What we have in our right-to-work state is collective begging," says Arlan Foster, a CO at the Plane State Jail in Dayton, Texas, and president of Local 3921 and Council 7. "We want to be treated with dignity, not subjected to the whims and caprices of our supervisors." Foster notes that Texas is 47th in the nation in wage compensation. "With bargaining rights, we can also institute a grievance process with binding arbitration," he adds. "A contract allows us to hold administrators accountable."



Jon Kerr

COs lobbied on Capitol Hill last year for collective bargaining. From left, Jerry Jones (Iowa Council 61), Tina Turner-Morfitt (Oregon Council 75), Patricia McGaffan (Local 4041), David Keister (Missouri Council 72), Lowell Ferrell (Colorado Council 76), Wendell Thompson (Pennsylvania Council 33) and Donald Baylor (Virginia Council 27).

Bridgette Duncan, a CO at the Pickaway Correctional Institution in Orient, Ohio, is encouraged not only by the chances of this bill becoming a federal law but its potential for attracting new ACU members, espe-

cially in states where collective bargaining doesn't exist. "Public safety is our duty and we're proud of it," she says. "But to do our jobs effectively,

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"To do our jobs effectively, we should be able to bargain for better wages and a safer workplace."

— CO Bridgette Duncan

Collective Bargaining

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we should be able to bargain for better wages and a safer workplace.” Despite her busy schedule as secretary-treasurer of Local 6550 of the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association/AFSCME Local 11 and a member of the labor/management committee, Duncan still finds time to sign up new members. “I wait for them outside the gate at the end of my shift,” she explains. “They need to know why being part of a union is important, so we can do a better job protecting the public.”



Allen Zak

CO Bridgette Duncan, and her husband, Danny — also a CO at Ohio's Pickaway Correctional Institution — work together to recruit more members to ACU.

Corrections Officers:
Please call your members of Congress at (202) 224-3121 today and ask them to support the Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act. Or write or e-mail the letter to the right.

Dear Senator/Representative:

As a dedicated public safety officer, I am asking for your support for legislation that would establish minimum standards for states in resolving workplace disputes where none currently exist. The “Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act” would allow public safety officers and their public employers to resolve disputes through mediation and fact-finding, and gives employees the right to meet with their employer to bargain over working conditions while preserving management rights.

It has been shown in case after case, that when public safety officers can discuss workplace conditions, partnerships and cooperation develop, which then lead to improved relations and better, more cost-effective public service.

As public safety officers, we put our lives on the line every day to make our communities safe. Please support us in our effort to gain workplace protections by co-sponsoring this important legislation. Thank you.

Sincerely,

(Name)
(Facility)



Ted Strickland: A CO's Champion

Few public officials have shown more concern about corrections issues than Ohio's recently elected governor, Ted Strickland (D). The five-term U.S. representative from the state's 6th District was elected last November on a platform that includes providing opportunities for working men and women, including ex-convicts who are returned to their communities to become productive members of society.

"Most people drive by a prison with no awareness of what happens inside," he told Associated Press in 2005. "The people who work there, by and large, are very conscientious ... but the day-to-day routine can have a wearing effect on anyone."

Strickland, 66, knows what happens on the inside. Before his 10 years as a congressional representative, he was a prison psychologist at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville — a maximum security facility that was the scene of an 11-day siege — the longest in U.S. prison history. It began Easter Sunday, April 11, 1993, when 12 COs — members of the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association (OCSEA)/AFSCME Local 11 — were taken hostage by a group of inmates. CO Robert Vallandingham was killed, and his body was thrown into the prison's courtyard, sparking a campaign for reform in Ohio's prisons.

RICH INSIGHTS. A Lucasville native, Strickland had just received his doctorate in psychology from the University of Kentucky when

respect, dignity and much-needed reforms to the corrections profession, and to develop programs dealing with such problems as gangs and stress.

Strickland says his days in Lucasville provided rich insights into the world of corrections. During his campaign, he pointed to it as one of the major things — including stints in active ministry, child care, community mental health, higher education and Congress — that "helped shape my outlook as a man and elected official."

Not surprisingly, he made standing up for working men and women a top priority when he became a congressman, earning a 98 percent voting record with AFSCME and the AFL-CIO. When AFSCME launched the Congressional Correctional Officers Caucus — which includes nearly 30 members who devote their time to correctional issues — Strickland was among its founders. With his leadership, the bipartisan group promoted legislation, policies and practices affecting COs and their families. He vigorously supported ACU's federal legislative agenda — from anti-privatization



Gov. Ted Strickland

ment as well as COs who work with mentally ill inmates. "They are at ground zero of our country's mental health crisis, 24/7," he said at a congressional hearing on the issue, illustrating "countless backward steps that have been made" to confine persons with mental illness because of lack of appropriate services.

During his congressional tenure, Strickland sponsored more than 20 bills relating to corrections. Among his final acts as a U.S. representative was the introduction of the Wayne "Cotton" Morgan Bulletproof Vest Act. Named after the CO who was gunned down on Aug. 9, 2005, while escorting a dangerous criminal from a courthouse in Kingston, Tenn., the bill would provide assistance to states for the purchase of armored vests for COs working in high-security-risk areas and in transporting prisoners. Morgan, who was treasurer of Local 2173 of AFSCME and worked at Brushy Mountain State Prison, had not been supplied with an armored vest when he was killed.

SOMBER REMINDER. Strickland said that the fallen officer could still be alive today had he worn protection. By introducing the bill, he wanted to make sure that what

"Most people drive by a prison with no awareness of what happens inside,"

— Gov. Ted Strickland

he began his stint at the prison. It was about that time when AFSCME launched an initiative called "Mandate for Change," to bring

measures to collective bargaining rights for COs.

The new governor has been a staunch advocate of law enforce-

happened in Kingston never occurs again. He called the attacks on Morgan — and two other Maryland COs who were killed in the line of

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duty last year (David McGuinn and Jefferey Wroten) — “a somber reminder of the risk that correctional officers undertake in order to perform a service critical to our nation’s justice system.”

At the AFSCME 37th International Convention in Chicago last year, Morgan’s son, Dennis, thanked Strickland for his leadership and vowed to take up the legislative

campaign that was inspired by his father’s death.

In a tribute to their profession, Governor Strickland has called COs “America’s unsung heroes.” Throughout his career, he has worked closely with ACU in fighting for their interests — for better pay and benefits, for safe workplaces — and for upholding their standard of professionalism in this field.

“We give a lot of credit to Governor Strickland for keeping our issues alive in Congress during his term,” says Tim Schafer, Corrections Assembly President, (OCSEA)/AFSCME Local 11. “We thank him for championing our cause and for being with us in the trenches, fighting for the rights of all public safety officers.” ●

BRIEFS

■ **BLUE RIBBON PANEL.** Ohio Civil Service Employees Association’s Corrections Assembly Pres. Tim Shafer urged Ohio legislators recently to create a broad task force to address the numerous problems the state’s prison system faces. “Our prison population is expected to grow by 20 percent in 5 years and 37 percent in 10 years,” he said. “Overcrowding and understaffing are a very dangerous mix.” Shafer urged swift action to prevent a recurrence of the 1993 deadly riot at a Lucasville prison.

■ **NEW PRISON.** COs from the state’s maximum and minimum prisons in Bismarck, N.D., demonstrated in front of the state legislature recently and called on lawmakers to approve a \$42-million construction project. “Prison overcrowding has alarming consequences,” says Brad Holt, president of N.D. Corrections United/AFSCME Local 2857. “The average daily population in our state prisons has increased by 28 percent in six years. Building a new prison is not only cost effective. It will ensure the safety of COs and the general public.”

■ **CONTRACT TALKS.** In Puerto Rico, members of Alianza Correccional Unida (ACU)/Servidores Públicos Unidos (SPU)/AFSCME Council 95 started contract negotiations last July. “After our sweet vindication



Peter Wrcay

Tim Shafer speaking before a panel of Ohio state legislators.

last summer, it’s a great feeling to finally move on to the next step — bargain for a contract that will give our COs the respect they deserve,” says ACU Local 3500 Pres. María Maurás Montañez. Their demands include wage increases for custody officers, tallying and payment of extra hours, guaranteed holidays and days off, and five complete uniforms per year for each CO. And ACU is demanding individualized security equipment for each officer, including bulletproof vests, helmets, gas masks and expandable batons. “We’re also asking for increased employer match contributions to our health plans, as well as an

increase in our Christmas bonus,” Maurás adds.

■ **CEO REBUFFED.** Colorado has formally cancelled a 2003 contract with the GEO Group to build a private prison in Pueblo for 500 state inmates. The Florida-based privateer has failed to break ground since it won the state contract. In 2003, it also had problems meeting state requirements for both the prison building and the programs GEO would offer to inmates about to be released into society. Moreover, GEO demanded more money than the state had originally

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budgeted, requesting that the state pay either additional money per inmate or provide a revenue guarantee amounting to \$1 billion over 30 years for two prisons

■ **GEO PENALIZED.** More woes for the privateer. Last September, a county jury in San Antonio, Texas, returned a \$47.5 million verdict — the largest in county history — in a negligence suit filed against the corporation, which ran the Willacy County State Jail in Raymondville. The judgment stemmed from the death of an inmate beaten inside the prison six years ago by two other inmates wielding socks stuffed with padlocks. The jury found that GEO was guilty of “failure to properly search, inadequate staffing and improper response.” ●

First-Ever Law Enforcement Conference

Save the Date!

AFSCME’s first-ever law enforcement conference will be held **Sept. 5-7 in Washington, D.C.**, at the same time as AFSCME’s biennial Corrections Congress. Both meetings will be **at the Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill**. The events will be separate, but attendees will join together for one day to lobby for a bill (H.R. 980) that would require all 50 states to provide a mechanism for collective bargaining rights for all police, firefighters, corrections officers and EMTs. More information, including a registration form, will be available soon on afscme.org.

