

**New York City Department of Correction
Office of Management Analysis & Planning**

Research and Evaluation Unit



**The Experience of Uniform Parents' Access to Childcare
Research Study**

September 2023

Executive summary

- Accessing childcare for working parents is a nationwide issue. For correction officers, there is very little information available specifically identifying barriers to accessing childcare. This research study is one of the first to address this knowledge gap.
- This research study included a survey and focus group discussions. The survey consisted of twenty-one questions to collect data from as many uniform parents as possible, and there were three focus group discussions consisting of nine uniform parents and one non-uniform parent.
- The data collection effort revealed that many uniform parents encounter issues at DOC related to inconsistent application of benefits as provided by HR, inconsistent scheduling, excessive overtime, and a culture hostile to uniform parents among facility leadership.
- This study presents six major recommendations to address these identified challenges: 1) DOC HR policies related to uniform parents; 2) Scheduling; 3) Overtime; 4) Cultural change; 5) Childcare assistance; 6) Miscellaneous recommendation related to accessing a phone line.
- Due to these numerous issues, a multi-pronged approach is necessary to comprehensively address the challenges that uniform staff encounter when accessing childcare services. The Department should also engage in conversations with relevant stakeholders to address these challenges.
- Additionally, implementing such policies could also help to alleviate issues that non-uniform parents encounter as well and could help boost morale amongst all uniform staff.

Acknowledgements

The Research and Evaluation (RE) Team would like to thank everyone who helped to make this report possible. We want to thank the Data and Analytics Team in OMAP as well as other units in DOC including the Department of Public Information (DCPI), Department of Administration, Office of the Chief of Staff, IT, HR, and Borough-Based Jails (BBJ). We would like to thank DC Edwards for offering his conference room to support the focus group discussions. Each DOC facility was gracious enough to let the RE Team attend roll calls and pass out information about this research study. We want to thank the leadership of each facility that hosted us.

We would also like to thank our external partners including the Correction Officers' Benevolent Association (COBA), the Correction Captains' Association (CCA), and the NYC DOC Assistant Deputy Wardens/Deputy Wardens (ADW/DW) who helped to distribute information about the survey. Without this assistance, we would not have received the number of responses that we had received.

Lastly, we would like to thank all the Correction Officers who participated in the survey and the focus group discussions. With the assistance of IT, the survey and focus group discussions were administered and coordinated over three weeks in July 2023 and the results were collected and analyzed in August 2023. We were able to produce this report because we received such insightful information and feedback due to the decades of experience of participating COs who have worked at DOC over the course of multiple leadership changes. Thank you for your time and sharing your experiences. We also want to thank DOC for the opportunity to conduct such a relevant research study. This evidence-based approach to addressing challenges and implementing change is an important step towards institutional reform.

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Introduction

Half of U.S. families report difficulty in finding childcare (Schochet, 2019) and over 365,000 adults reported losing a job because they needed to take time to care for their children (Mader, 2022). The recent COVID-19 pandemic has only further exacerbated the issue as over 15,000 childcare providers have closed since 2020 (Lurye, 2022) further limiting the supply of the availability of childcare services. This issue spans multiple industries, especially industries with non-traditional work shifts (Bateman, 2020). Nurses, EMTs, police officers, correction officers, and other professionals with non-traditional work shifts encounter similar issues with regards to accessing childcare. Childcare services usually provide coverage for parents who work traditional 9 – 5 shifts. Professionals who work beyond this timeframe may lack the availability of coverage. Due to the lack of a consistent and reliable schedule, parents who work in these professions often have difficulty finding childcare that meets the time demands of non-traditional work hours. This dynamic is especially problematic for single moms as access to childcare services becomes increasingly difficult due to the lack of a significant other to rely on for childcare coverage. This disproportionately impacts minority groups as 71% of Black mothers and 41% of Hispanic mothers report being the sole providers in their homes (Schochet, 2019).

There are added challenges accessing childcare beyond shift time and parental dynamics. The cost and location of childcare are a few reasons why parents have difficulty finding childcare (Koschmann et al., 2021), but childcare is necessary for parents. New York state ranks number one in the country for the least affordable childcare related to center-based and family-based care for infants, toddlers, and 4-year-olds with a price tag of around \$18,000 to over \$20,000 per year in childcare expenses which can be upwards of almost 18% of a family's income (data for the costs for school-age children in New York was unavailable) (Childcare Aware of America, 2022). Mothers, especially, are compelled to make job related decisions based on childcare considerations rather than consideration of their financial situation or career. As a result, mothers were 40% more likely than fathers to note the impact of childcare issues on their careers (Schochet, 2019). Additionally, households with children younger than school age are in greater need of care.

Beyond the issues highlighted above, there is a need to understand the challenges in more detail that certain industries encounter when accessing childcare. For correction officers (COs), more information is needed to specifically identify barriers to childcare, and more research needs to be done related to understanding which issues correction officers confront related to accessing childcare.

Uniform parents and childcare at NYC's Department of Correction

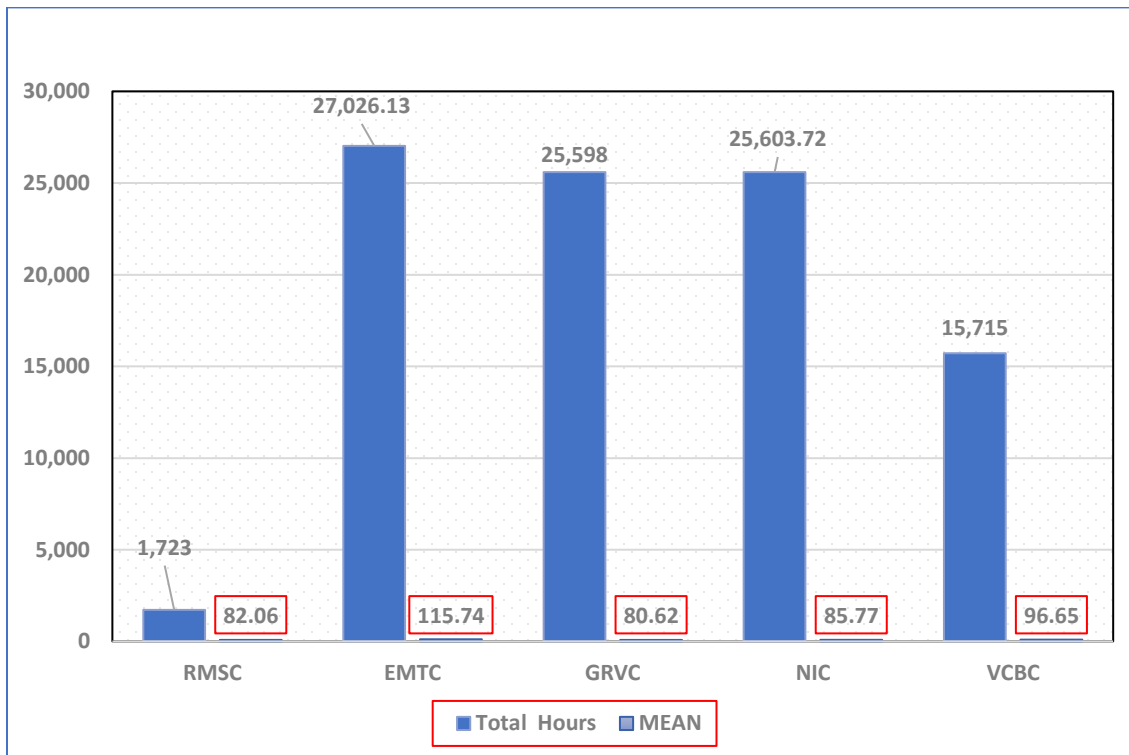
For the past two years, the Department of Correction (DOC) has made significant improvements to managing and assigning uniform staff. These improvements relate to maintaining an appropriately sized workforce, increases in staffing availability, and implementation of updated technology to track staffing levels (Martin et al., 2023a). Policy revisions and the hiring of leadership in the SMART unit are two areas that are works in progress. However, staffing and shift coverage is a continuing issue for various reasons.

Additionally, in 2016 from August to October, DOC piloted an initiative entitled, "Tour or Location Changes for Child or Family Care Reasons" that was "designed to assist correction officers who are experiencing childcare or family issues and have a member of the Department with whom they share a child or family care duties." This pilot program allowed COs to request a change of tour to be at different times of a CO spouse who also worked in the Department if the CO has "a child in common with a

member of the Department” (DOC, 2016). This piloted program was widely popular amongst uniform parents and incurred minimal costs to the Department; but for unknown reasons, the program was discontinued that same year.

Beyond the acknowledgement of improvements to staffing issues over the past decade, mitigating staffing issues remains a challenge for DOC. Overtime is one critical issue with regards to staffing as some correction officers have accumulated over 150 hours of overtime per month with some facilities incurring over 25,000 hours of overtime a month (please see Figure 1 below). The demands of overtime especially put pressure on uniform parents who may not necessarily have access to childcare resources during certain times of the day and night after the scheduled shift time or may need more flexibility to make last minute changes related to childcare services.

Figure 1. Overtime (in hours) per facility for July 2023



If childcare services are unavailable to uniform parents who are asked to provide last minute shift coverage, the uniform parents are put in an uncomfortable position of having to choose between the safety and security of their child or the preservation of their livelihood. Some uniform parents may choose to leave and not provide shift coverage without the approval of their supervisor. This not only increases issues with regards to appropriate staffing coverage in DOC facilities, but it also leads to morale issues for those uniform staff who must stay longer to cover for those who leave their shift unexpectedly. Those staff covering shifts and remaining at post for longer than expected are not mentally and physically prepared with limited access to food and resource options.

Additionally, once an officer reports to post in the facility, the officer does not have contact with the outside world. The officer does not have access to cell phones, fax, email, or any other way to communicate with anyone outside the facility and off Rikers Island. If an officer is tasked with covering a shift unexpectedly after reporting for the originally scheduled shift, the officer has no way to

communicate with anyone outside of the facility with regards to the delay of being relieved from work. As a result, if a uniform parent must cover a shift unexpectedly, the uniform parent has no mechanism to communicate the delay in retrieving their child(ren) to childcare services. Because of this, management at childcare services concludes that the uniform parent has abandoned their child(ren), and that parent is reported to NYC's Administration for Children's Services (ACS). This reporting of uniform parents can have drastic repercussions. These repercussions include significant time and resource investment in responding to ACS with certain document and court requirements, unexpected financial loss due to ACS involvement and reporting requirements, a negative impact on mental health, and can impact the relationship that the parent has with the child(ren). These issues can then impact the morale and, potentially, the quality of work for uniform staff.

In response to these very serious problems, this research study seeks to better understand the challenges that uniform staff encounter when trying to access childcare by collecting information about uniform parents' experiences and identifying direct challenges when accessing childcare. Additionally, this study attempts to capture childcare options that correction officers have, the most difficult shifts for parents to cover due to lack of childcare options, and how access to childcare impacts the correction officers' availability on the job.

Research study overview

This study's main goal is to better understand the challenges that uniform staff encounter when trying to access childcare by collecting information and experiences directly from uniform parents. This study is one of the first to collect data as well as explore and analyze the results related to the challenges uniform parents encounter when accessing childcare. This research study used two study methods to gather information about the availability of childcare, how uniform parents access childcare, and the challenges when accessing childcare. This study included a survey of uniform staff as well as focus group discussions, and these two mechanisms were designed to collect as much information as possible from uniform staff.

To raise awareness of the request to complete the survey and to recruit volunteers from uniform staff to participate in the focus group discussions, basic marketing tools such as emails and flyers were created and distributed to generate interest in the survey and encourage and increase participation amongst COs. This marketing plan included the involvement of relevant internal stakeholders such as Department of Public Information (DCPI), Department of Administration, Office of the Chief of Staff, IT, and HR as well as external stakeholders such as the Correction Officers' Benevolent Association (COBA), the Correction Captains' Association (CCA), and the NYC DOC Assistant Deputy Wardens/Deputy Wardens (ADW/DW) group.

Additionally, the Research and Evaluation (RE) Team staff traveled to 5 different facilities on Rikers Island and the Vernon C. Bain Correction (VCBC) Center and participated in 10 different roll calls at different times of the day to spread awareness about the research study. The variations in roll call times as well as the visiting of different facilities to include the training and administrative offices helped to inform a variety of uniform staff of various ranks to ensure that diverse perspectives were represented regarding the completion of the survey as well as voluntary participation in the focus group discussions.

Survey results

A 21-question survey was created and distributed throughout the Department to collect as much information as possible from uniform staff and was open for three weeks. This survey sought to gather basic demographic information from uniform staff related to how many are parents as well as how many children they have and if they have responsibility for such children. The survey also gathered information about commute locations, times, and childcare resources that uniform staff use for their children. The survey was also used to collect information about the number of times that uniform staff called in sick to care for their child(ren) as well as how many times they had been asked to do overtime which caused a rearrangement of childcare services.

Response rate and general uniform parent demographics

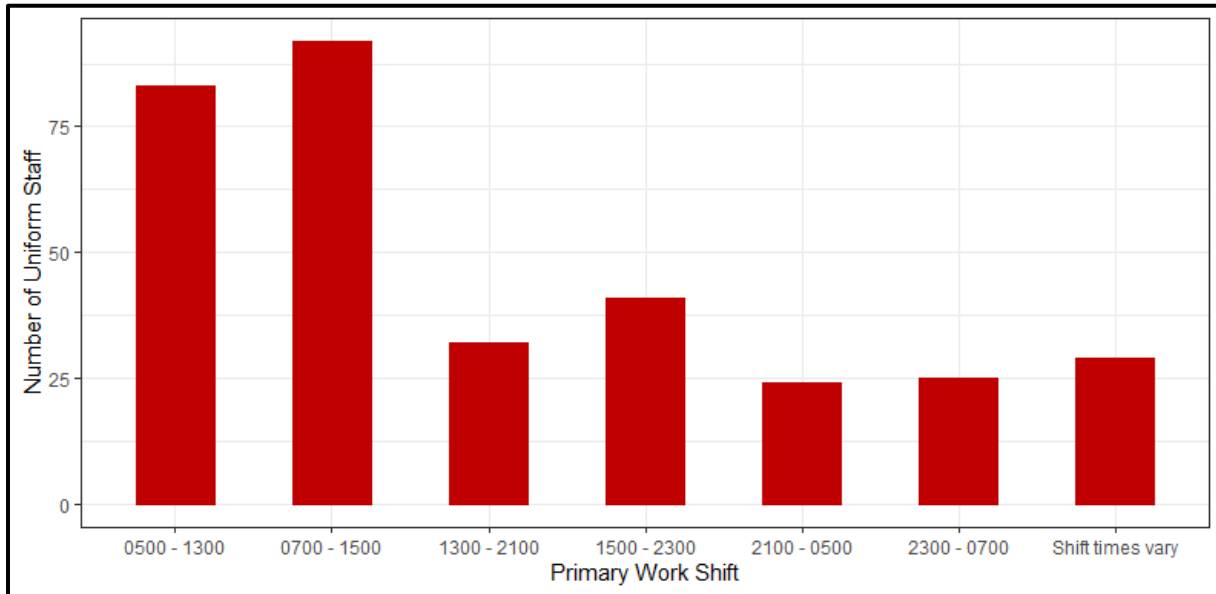
Of the current 6,494 uniform staff that DOC employs, there were 352 responses to the survey which is a response rate of 5%. Of those 352 responses, 326 staff were parents to include 224 mothers, 101 fathers, and one grandparent with custody of their grandchild; 57% (186) of respondents indicated that they had a spouse, partner, or somebody else who was providing some type of childcare support, and around 43% (140) of respondents indicated that they were single and the sole caregiver of their child(ren). Table 1 (please refer to Table 1 below) provides more detailed percentages related to the marital status of the respondents.

Table 1. Uniform Staff respondents' marital status

Marital status	Percent of respondents
Married	31%
Partnered but not officially married	15%
Single but receiving some form of childcare support from another person	10%
Single, sole caregiver of the child(ren)	43%

Overall, the primary work shifts of the respondents varied considerably (please refer to Figure 2 below). More respondents worked day shifts, with 83 respondents assigned to the 0500 – 1300 shift and 92 respondents assigned to the 0700 – 1500 shift. For the afternoon shifts, 32 respondents worked 1300 – 2100 and 41 worked from 1500 – 2300. The evening shifts had a smaller number of respondents with 24 and 25 respectively.

Figure 2. Uniform Staff respondents' primary work shift



Of the 326 uniform parents who completed the survey, over 300 had primary responsibility for their child(ren), biological and non-biological. Many uniform parents had primary caregiving responsibilities for at least one to two children, with 130 and 120 respondents respectively. 50 respondents indicated that they are the primary caregivers for 3 children; and 26 respondents have primary caregiving responsibilities for 4 or more children. The age ranges of these children varied considerably. Of the 326 responses, 298 respondents indicated that they were responsible for newborns to children ages 12 years old. This is important to note as children in this age range require constant or consistent adult supervision and care.

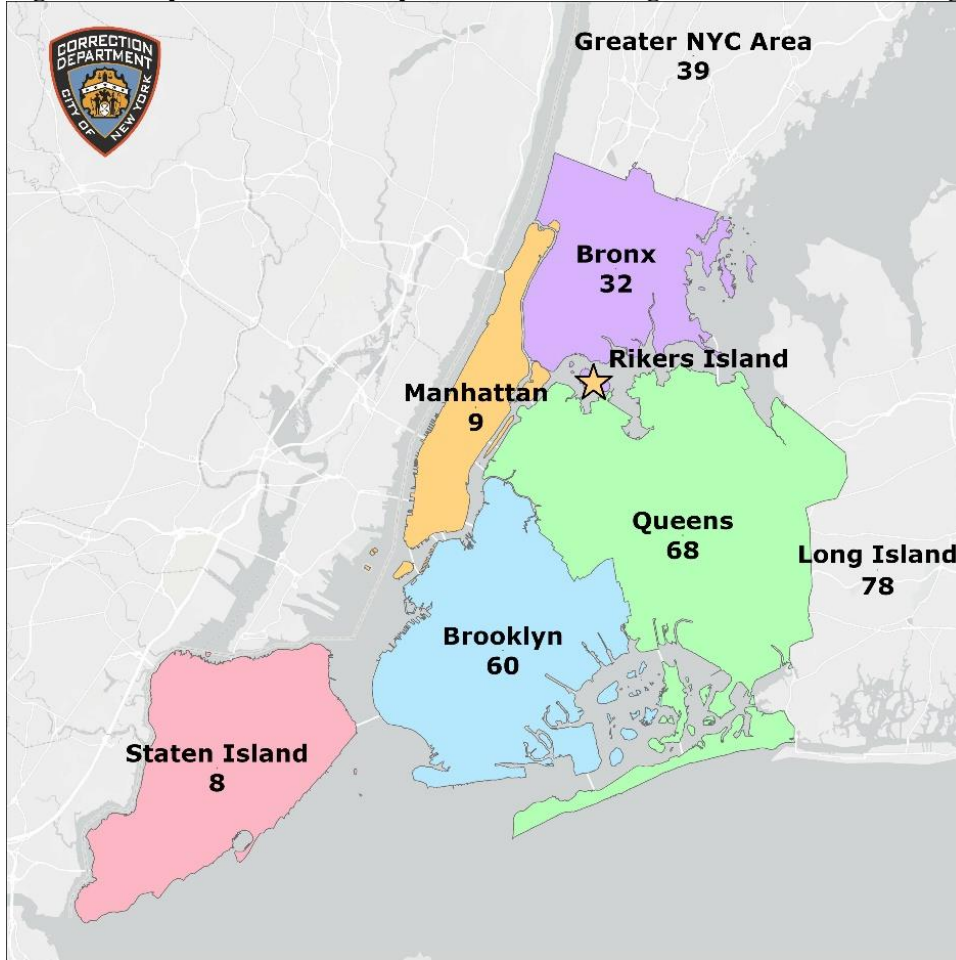
The survey also gathered responses about commuting times and locations. Over 150 respondents, almost half, currently have a commute that was more than one hour long. 149 respondents had commutes of thirty minutes to one hour. Only 26 respondents had commute times less than thirty minutes (please refer to Table 2 below).

Table 2. Total commute time for Uniform Staff

Total commute time	Number of Respondents
5 – 10 minutes	1
11 – 20 minutes	3
21 – 30 minutes	22
31 – 45 minutes	57
46 minutes – one hour	92
More than one hour	151

Many respondents were commuting from the Brooklyn and Queens boroughs which are the boroughs located closest to Rikers Island. Interestingly, Long Island had the most commuters with 78 which possibly explains the large number of respondents who had commute times of over an hour. There were 39 respondents who commuted from beyond the five NYC boroughs, and 32 respondents who indicated that they commuted from more than one borough. There were few respondents who commuted from Manhattan and Staten Island (please refer to Figure 3 below).

Figure 3. Map of number of respondents commuting from each NYC borough



Childcare services

All respondents had variously different childcare arrangements. A total of 174 respondents utilized only one type of childcare service. All other respondents used a variety of combinations of childcare resources to ensure that their children received the appropriate level of supervision. Table 3 highlights the shift times and which childcare resources uniform parents access for those shift times. For the 0500 – 1300 shift time, 30 respondents use a spouse, significant other, or family member, 5 respondents use a family friend and/or neighbor, 4 respondents use in-home childcare, 10 respondents use commercial or private group care to include a daycare center, church-sponsored programs, and others, 1 respondent used a type of childcare service that was not provided, and 33 respondents used a combination of a variety of childcare resources to include two or more of the provided options. For the 0700 – 1500 shift time, 21 respondents use a spouse, significant other, or family member, 8 respondents use a family friend and/or neighbor, 3 respondents use in-home childcare, 12 respondents use commercial or private group care to

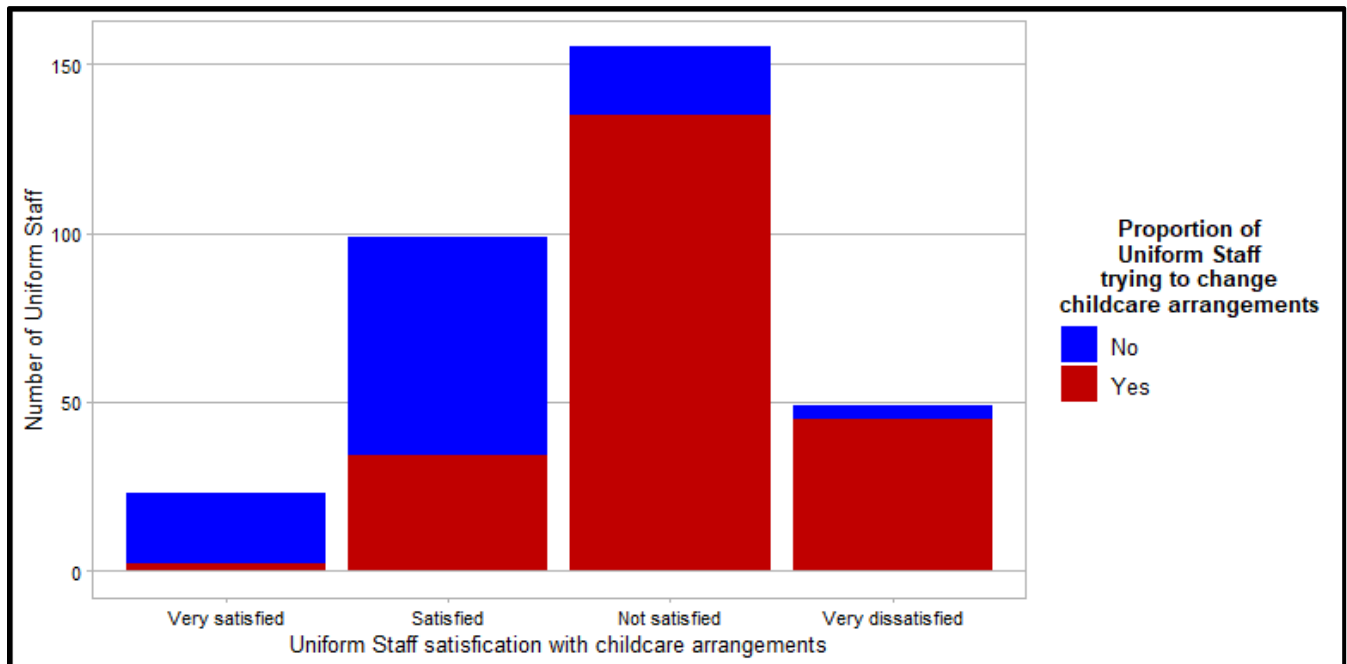
include a daycare center, church-sponsored programs, and others, 1 respondent used a type of childcare service that was not provided, and 47 respondents used a combination of a variety of childcare resources to include two or more of the provided options. Similar patterns related to the proportion of respondents who use a combination of different childcare resources can be seen with all other shifts. This indicates that for all shift times, there were a variety of childcare resources uniform parents used to ensure adequate care and supervision for their children.

Table 3. Current childcare arrangements per primary work shift

Primary work shift	Spouse, significant other, and family member	Friends and/or neighbor	In-home childcare	Commercial or private group care	Other	Combination of all the options	Totals responses per shift
0500 – 1300	30	5	4	10	1	33	83
0700 – 1500	21	8	3	12	1	47	92
1300 – 2100	11	0	1	3	0	17	32
1500 – 2300	13	1	4	8	0	15	41
2100 – 0500	6	3	1	3	0	11	24
2300 – 0700	6	0	2	3	2	12	25
Shift times vary	7	1	4	4	1	12	29

For levels of satisfaction related to current childcare arrangements, 204 respondents were not satisfied or very dissatisfied with their current childcare arrangements. Out of those 204 responses, 180 respondents were trying to change their childcare arrangements. Additionally, 122 respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their childcare arrangements. Even for these satisfied respondents, 36 respondents were trying to change their childcare arrangements (please refer to Figure 4 below).

Figure 4. Levels of satisfaction with current childcare arrangements and respondents who are trying to change childcare arrangements

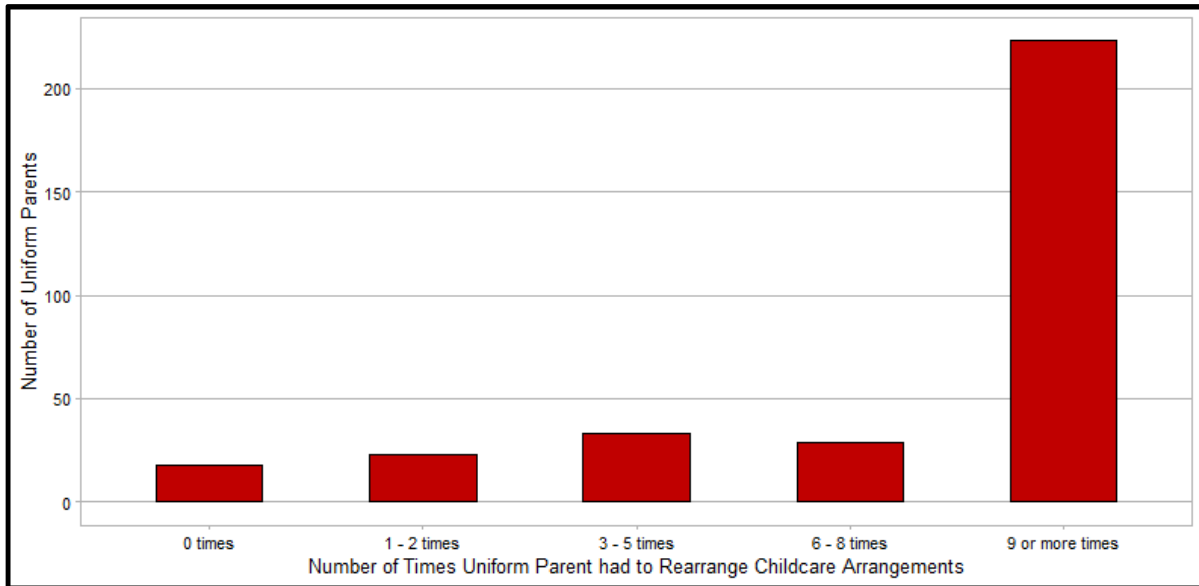


Childcare and DOC

Uniform parents were also asked about how many days they had missed work or been significantly late due to childcare issues in the last six months. Some examples include staying home with a sick child, childcare as unavailable, or transportation problems related to childcare. 51 respondents indicated that they had not missed work or missed one day of work due to childcare issues, 64 respondents indicated that they missed 2 – 3 days of work, 76 respondents indicated that they missed 4 – 5 days, 50 respondents indicated that they missed 6 – 9 days, and 85 respondents indicated that they missed more than 10 days due to childcare issues. This translates to over half of the respondents, around 60%, missed work 4 or more days in the last six months due to childcare issues. This indicates that many uniform parents’ presence at work can be significantly impacted by childcare issues. The inability to tap into childcare resources causes a lot of uniform parents to miss work.

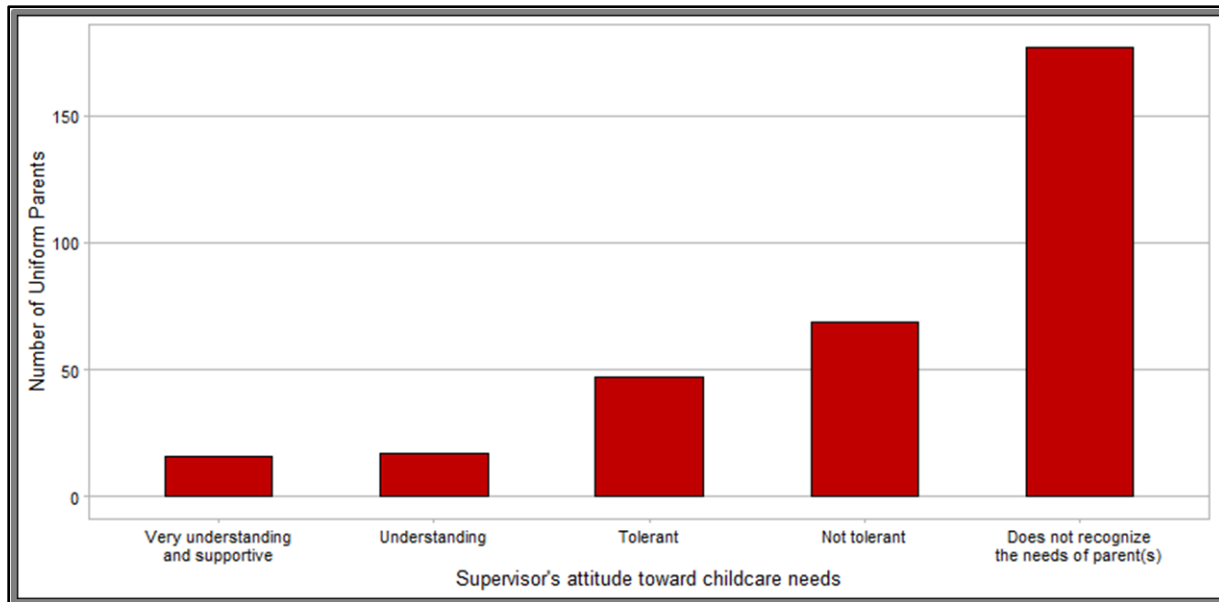
Furthermore, uniform parents were asked to estimate how many times in the past three months they had been asked to stay later than their scheduled shift which caused them to rearrange their childcare plans. Out of all 326 responses, 223 respondents had indicated that they had been in a position to change their childcare arrangements 9 times or even more due to overtime requests while only 18 respondents indicated that they had not been in a position to change their childcare arrangements due to overtime requests (please refer to Figure 5 below).

Figure 5. The number of Uniform Parents who had to rearrange their childcare needs due to DOC's overtime request in the last three months



Uniform parents were also asked how they would describe their supervisor's attitudes towards childcare and associated difficulties that uniform staff may have with finding and maintaining adequate childcare (please see Figure 6 below). Around 75% (246), a significant amount, of uniform parents indicated that DOC leadership did not recognize the needs of parents and were not tolerant of the needs of parents. Around 10% (33) of respondents indicated that DOC leadership was very understanding and supportive and understanding of the needs of parents. Around 14% (47) respondents indicated that DOC leadership was "tolerant" of the needs of parents. Supervisory attitudes as well as DOC's culture related to uniform parents' accessing childcare was a topic that was also discussed during the focus group discussions.

Figure 6. Perspective of Uniform Parents regarding supervisor's attitude towards childcare needs



One of the last survey questions asked respondents to choose which programs they would be interested participating in: 105 respondents indicated that they would be interested in flexibility in shift preferences, 103 respondents indicated that they would be interested in childcare cost coverage, 41 respondents indicated that they would be interested in on-site services, and 34 indicated that they would be interested in scheduling changes. 43 respondents indicated other ideas that they had related to programs that were available related to accessing childcare.

Submitted comments

The last survey question was an open-ended question in which a respondent could provide additional information in the form of comments related to any other challenges they encountered or if the respondent had any ideas related to childcare issues. There was a total of 154 surveys in which the survey response included some type of comment, and these submitted comments varied in substance. There were at least 10 comments that indicated that they had no comments at this time and did not provide any feedback or ideas. The remaining comments were organized according to common themes. These common themes were divided into two main categories: challenges and ideas. Identified challenges centered around five main issues: 1) lack of understanding by DOC staff and supervisors towards uniform staff with child(ren); 2) scheduling issues; 3) amount of overtime as a major barrier; 4) sick kids and emergencies and; 5) both parents as uniform staff members. Many of these comments relayed negative experiences of the uniform parents with regards to having a child(ren) while working at DOC.

Beyond the outlined challenges, there were submitted comments that provided ideas as to how DOC could address the issues that uniform parents encounter when accessing childcare services. These suggestions centered around eight common themes: 1) DOC policy changes; 2) access to an external line of some sort while at post; 3) reduction of overtime; 4) changes to scheduling and/or shifts; 5) staffing changes; 6) childcare cost coverage; 7) proposal of providing childcare facilities at convenient locations and; 8) provision of transportation to and from childcare facilities. There were also miscellaneous comments and general frustrations that were provided related to DOC's approach or lack thereof regarding uniform staff with children and the inability to access childcare services.

It is important to note that there were at least five submitted comments that included frustrations and difficulties uniform parents encounter related to children who have special needs. This theme also became prevalent during the focus group discussions.

Focus group discussions

This study included three focus group discussions with 9 uniform staff and 1 non-uniform staff, nine female and one male, of varying ranks to include Captains, Deputy Wardens, and Correction Officers. One non-uniform staff member worked similar hours as the uniform staff to include overtime. Due to the recognized scheduling similarities between non-uniform and uniform staff members, it was decided that this non-uniform staff member be included in the focus group discussions. Participants in the focus groups worked for DOC from 5 to 17 years.

The focus group discussions lasted about an hour to an hour and a half and consisted of a semi-structured discussion format that included 13 questions centered around three common themes: 1) overview of the family structure; 2) childcare resources and services that are currently utilized and; 3) challenges and recommendations for improving access to childcare. The focus group discussions revealed many of the challenges as well as frustrations that uniform staff had with accessing childcare.

There were some concerns that the participants would be hesitant to share criticisms of the Department with fellow Department staff and in a Departmental setting. However, during all focus group discussions, the participants indicated that sharing personal perspectives and experiences was important as the participants had encountered many challenges and frustrations with the Department as uniform staff and had wanted to provide feedback to instigate change and reform for fellow and future colleagues. Additionally, throughout the discussions, there were several moments of high emotions such as feelings of sadness, anxiety, frustration, and anger when participants were sharing their experiences working with DOC as a parent. More than one participant even teared up while explaining frustrations related to navigating DOC as a parent.

Overview of the family structure

The focus group participants had various numbers of children to include 1, 2, and 4 children as examples, and the ages of the children varied from newborns to adolescents to grown adults. Two participants had children with special needs. Participants also included individuals who were single parents as well as individuals who are married. One of the married participants had a spouse who also worked for DOC.

Current childcare resources and services

Many participants reported that they rely on family members, significant others, and neighbors for childcare assistance when they are working. Some of the participants indicated that they split childcare responsibilities with their partner to ensure one parent is available to be with the child(ren). Working overtime caused a strain on this arrangement as the uniform parent needs to return home in a timely manner to relieve their partners. Single uniform parents are particularly affected by the struggle to provide adequate childcare while working varying shifts and hours. One participant said that they have relied on a home camera system that is connected to her phone as a “babysitting” source.

Due to the reliance on family members and neighbors for childcare, relatively few of the focus group participants dropped off child(ren) to childcare facilities as they are cared for at-home. However, when family members did help uniform parents with child supervision, most family members did not understand DOC and the culture of non-support by DOC leadership. Many participants shared frustration with DOC as uniform staff “are treated like we’re just a number.” Some participants shared that they use services that are closer to home such as a live-in nanny or a commercial daycare facility. On the other end of the spectrum, some participants reported driving up to two hours to get home to relieve a spouse or family member who had been watching their children.

Identified challenges

Four main issues were identified that caused major barriers related to accessing childcare resources for uniform parents that were identified through the three focus group discussions.

1. DOC policies

From the time that uniform staff are about 28 – 32 weeks pregnant to 6 – 8 weeks after giving birth, uniform staff utilize maternity leave. Maternity leave includes benefits that are provided by the state of New York. All participants indicated that they did not have any issues or encounter any problems when they were on maternity leave as the state benefits for maternity leave were easy to access and navigate. Participants indicated that problems would begin when they transitioned to benefits provided by DOC HR.

After transitioning from state benefits to benefits provided by DOC's HR, some participants reported using DOC Family Medical Leave Assistance (FMLA). One participant said, "I took FMLA for [an] extra four months to care for my child." Another participant shared that "I have also used CARE [services] and hardships [benefits]." Some uniform parents were able to access certain benefits while other uniform parents were not made aware that such benefits existed or were told that they could not access such benefits. There was an inconsistency with which HR would share information about policies related to maternity leave, childcare-related policies, and sick leave. Most uniform staff indicated that they are not familiar with the HR structure and policies regarding parental benefits and childcare. If the participants were aware of such policies, there was an indication that this awareness was due to accessing certain HR personnel who were able to provide information and access to certain benefits. As a result, accessing certain HR personnel would result in accessing benefits while accessing other HR personnel would result in lack of access to such benefits. This lack of objective processing reinforces the feeling that the Department perpetuates favoritism. One participant shared that a colleague had just left the Department due to the inability to successfully navigate HR policies and family benefits.

Due to the inability to get access to benefit and leave information, there was a general sense of frustration with HR among the participants. Participants also voiced the concern that there was a disconnect between the benefits and information shared by the Health Management Division (HMD) and HR as both entities managed different benefits and would often provide inconsistent information. Participants voiced a lot of frustration with regards to this bureaucratic dynamic by saying that HR was "unhelpful" and that there were "a lot of things that they [HR] don't know."

Beyond HR, there were stories of suspected cases of nepotism that were prevalent during these discussions. One uniform parent indicated that they had been blocked for a promotion due to the reason that they were a parent. More than one participant had filed with EEO due to such challenges that they encountered, and even recommended a fellow focus group participant file with EEO.

2. Shift times

It was widely shared among all participants that certain shift times and positions were preferred over others. Most participants indicated that they did not want certain promotions to higher ranking positions due to the schedules available for specific ranks and positions. For example, for the parents who had younger children that required childcare, more traditional day shifts were preferred due to the times that childcare facilities operate. Participants indicated that most childcare facilities are not open for early morning shifts, especially from 4:00am to 5:00am. During this time, when childcare services are unavailable, the participants indicated that they would extensively rely on close family and friends for coverage. For those uniform parents who did not have family in the area, they really struggled with trying to find childcare coverage.

Participants also reported that finding care can be difficult for parents of infants and toddlers who are working second and third shifts. Overall, the participants used a variety of different childcare resources to secure childcare coverage for their non-traditional work hours and shifts. One participant indicated that they had three different babysitters to ensure for adequate childcare coverage.

3. Overtime

Furthermore, participants reported that finding childcare has been difficult due to mandatory overtime. Daycare facilities are not open after hours to accommodate uniform staff. Similar for shift time preferences, participants indicated that certain roles and promotions at DOC were preferred since certain ranks did not do much overtime, especially as the extended workdays lead to problems for uniform

parents related to obtaining adequate childcare since most childcare facilities are tailored to the eight-hour daytime shift. This is especially true for single parent families and those working overnight shifts.

When uniform parents are asked to stay for unscheduled overtime, parents must scramble to find alternative options or leave work without approval to care for their children. Participants reported difficulty finding daycare or babysitter services to watch child(ren) for such long shift hours. One uniform staff noted, “No facility is open 24 hours to accommodate our shift.” If such childcare services are available, participants indicated that they are high cost, offer limited availability, and provide inconvenient program hours. Beyond this, some participants indicated that finding such childcare for children with special needs is even more difficult.

The most common response reported by the participants is that supervisors need to be more accommodating. Usually, supervisors assign a 4x2 tour¹, and the end time of the shift is problematic because uniform staff are often required to work overtime after completing their regular shift. There can be many instances in which there are last-minute notice of scheduling changes. To compound the issue, according to some participants, captains assign shifts based on personal feelings. One participant shared that “There is a lot of nepotism in the unit,” and another said, with tears dripping down her eyes that “[T]he worst shifts are given to parents...I cannot leave at 1300 to pick up my child from school and no one cares.” Overall, there was a shared belief that the system is punishing working mothers.

4. Costs of childcare

Beyond the issues encountered internally, many participants reported that childcare expenses consume most of their paycheck. Uniform parents indicated that they need assistance finding affordable childcare that aligns with their work schedules to include availability during evenings and weekends.

Focus Group Recommendations

According to the participants of the focus groups, many of these challenges accessing childcare could be solved internally by DOC. The most common response from uniform parents is the request for flexibility and consistent days off. Other suggested solutions include providing support services entitled to officers by removing unpredictable and unfair work schedules and providing options for overtime to parents with small children as well as some assistance with childcare costs.

Even beyond these suggestions related to institutional changes, many participants indicated that there should be a cultural change among leadership in DOC. Many participants highlighted the fact that DOC and its leadership needed to be more compassionate towards its uniform staff. They also said that there was an inconsistency with which schedules and scheduling preferences were adhered to.

Limitations

There are many limitations to this study. Despite the survey response rate of 5%, there are limitations to generalizing such results to the general uniform staff population. As the survey results revealed, many respondents are not satisfied with their current childcare arrangements nor with Department’s supposed lack of concern for uniform parents. As such, they would be particularly motivated to respond to such a survey, thereby highlighting this issue as more of a problem than it possibly would be with uniform staff. If additional data were available such as how many uniform staff have children as well as additional information about shifts and overtime for facilities, this type of data would allow the team to conduct

¹ A 4x2 tour is four consecutive days of 8.5-hour shifts followed by two days off.

additional analysis to understand the prevalence of the problem among uniform staff. However, based on a preliminary review of overtime as well as extensive review of the Monitor's reports, staffing issues are a recurrent theme and should be addressed regardless of any other identified issues (i.e. access to childcare issues).

Similarly, for the focus group discussions, it would be important to acknowledge a similar dynamic. Per the analysis of these discussions, most all participants encountered issues with accessing benefits related to family support and navigating DOC's bureaucracy as well as trying to make childcare work for their families. While this is useful information, it would be difficult to generalize these results to the entirety of uniform parents. Also, while overtime issues were discussed, one participant had highlighted that this was not a problem for the facility that this individual managed, however, this individual also stated that it had been a problem historically and wanted to share information to spur awareness and reform. Additional exploration into these dynamics would be required to understand additional staffing dynamics per facility and the prevalence of these problems.

While these limitations are important to highlight, access to childcare is a nationwide issue. Especially for those families whose parents work inconsistent or non-traditional work schedules. As a result, while these limitations highlight caution related to generalizing such results to all DOC uniform parents, these challenges and trends related to accessing childcare are consistent with the scholarly literature and should be taken with careful consideration.

Summary

Throughout this engagement effort, uniform parents reported that they would like access to quality and affordable childcare; however, through analyzing the survey results and the focus group discussions, uniform parents indicated that there were several difficulties with accessing childcare resources. Many of these difficulties stemmed from DOC's policies and procedures, especially around benefits as provided by HR as well as shifts, scheduling, and overtime. The inability of DOC to sufficiently address and assuage any concerns from uniform parents as well as the resulting frustrations can lead to the deterioration of staff morale. Indeed, the survey results and focus group discussions revealed that there were low levels of morale amongst the staff due to such negative experiences. Low levels of morale among the staff can manifest and affect the quality of work of all correction officers.

Due to issues regarding scheduling and overtime, these uniform parents must have a variety of different childcare resources available. The inability to tap into such childcare resources causes a lot of uniform parents to miss work which exacerbates the staffing crisis. Additionally, at the beginning of this report, Figure 1 illustrates that overtime is a major issue with several DOC facilities; many DOC facilities have extraordinary amounts of overtime. Upon closer examination, some correction officers have no overtime while others are assigned hundreds of hours of overtime in the same facility. While some correction officers enjoy the opportunity to accrue overtime hours, many correction officers, especially uniform parents, often want to complete their shift and return home to their families in a timely manner.

While many of these comments may not be feasible to adopt or implement, it is important for DOC to review such comments to understand the general frustrations and difficulties that uniform parents encounter. Uniform parents try to maintain a sustainable approach to parenting while also remaining gainfully employed. The lack of compassion by DOC generally, and more specifically, by DOC leadership is a common thread throughout the comments from the survey as well as the focus group discussions. The need for DOC to seriously consider and address the frustrations and challenges as

revealed by this study is imperative to improve the morale of the uniform staff as well as address very real workplace issues that uniform parents encounter. Some comments in the survey as well as the focus group discussions indicated that even though these individuals have been productive employees for numerous years, there is a general feeling of neglect and dismissal by DOC leadership towards uniform staff issues and challenges.

Recommendations

After analyzing the survey results and content of the focus group discussions, potential recommendations listed under six main themes were included that DOC could explore for feasibility to successfully address challenges uniform parents have accessing childcare.

1. DOC HR policies related to uniform parents

1.1 Provide longer maternity leave benefits for uniform parents

In addition to the leave that is provided through the state of New York, DOC could provide longer leave time for uniform parents. The longer leave time would allow uniform parents additional time and resources to spend with their children as well as time for parents to arrange childcare for the family. This could also possibly help recruitment and retention efforts as well.

1.2 Exploration of added benefits for uniform parents

DOC could provide added benefits for uniform parents that could include child-related PTO as well as a flex account of up to \$5,000 in pre-tax funds specifically for childcare cost coverage. This could signal additional support that the Department is investing in its uniform staff and providing benefits to assist them with their work life balance. This could also possibly help recruitment and retention efforts as well.

1.3 Training of all HR staff

All HR staff should be trained in understanding benefits for DOC parents. There should also be dedicated HR representatives who handle all such claims or at least reviews such claims to ensure consistency with application and awarding of such benefits. Through NYC's Office of Labor Relations, there are additional benefits that the city provides its employees, which could include some recommendations from 1.2 (i.e. pre-tax flex account dedicated to financing childcare services as highlighted above). However, no one in the focus group discussions nor in the survey mentioned these benefits or indicated that they had known about and/or taken advantage of these programs. It would be important for HR to understand these benefits and ensure that uniform staff can access them.

1.4 Dedicated HR staff to monitor the implementation of parent-related benefits

There should be a dedicated HR representative who is working with facility leadership to consistently implement FMLA, hardship requests, sick leave, Personal Emergency (PE), and other such policies. This representative could provide consistent application of such policies as well as monitoring these policies for abuse or privilege. Data collection efforts could also provide more information as to the number of staff who are actively utilizing such policies. This could help to inform additional policy recommendations to address staffing issues not related to childcare.

1.5 Awareness raising campaign for uniform parents

More information should be made available for employees who are parents in DOC. There should be dedicated portions of training devoted for employees to understand benefits that are provided by HR to include those benefits for parents. This information should also be shared during in-service training and other trainings that are mandatory for DOC employees. There could also be attendance at roll call and appearances in the facilities by HR staff who are specifically tasked with purview of these benefits (see recommendation 1.4).

1.6 On-line resources

There should be information available on the intranet that is dedicated for DOC parents so that all employees can review benefit information on-line, and there should be greater transparency with which this information is available.

2. Scheduling

2.1 Return of DOC Uniform Spouse Policy

The policy, “Tour or Location Changes for Child or Family Care Reasons,” as highlighted in the beginning of this report provided uniform parents with an opportunity take separate shifts if their spouse worked for DOC. This policy should be reinstated immediately in support of uniform staff who are married, share custody of children, and work for DOC. The teletype outlines that facility leadership process these requests. Due to lack of transparency, this process can perpetuate favoritism amongst facility leadership and its staff. Due to the ongoing reports of inconsistent application of certain policies, this recommendation highlights the need to move this request process from the purview of facility leadership to a central office that is managed by trained staff with expertise in understanding how to process such requests as well as have purview over facility scheduling needs and staffing requirements. The approval and disapproval process should be objectively administered, transparent, and include an appeal process so that all requests are treated with equity. Additionally, this policy should be officially established so that there is institutional support and transparency with regards to the process of these requests.

2.2 Process for submitting hardship requests

The hardship request document outlines the process for specific requests that uniform staff can submit related to any issues that the uniform staff encounter with regards to personal and family emergencies. The accompanied require form, Form 600AR, is a blank document that provides no additional guidance. Currently, this request is processed by facility leadership and has no accompanying official policy or directive. Similar to the DOC uniform spouse policy, hardship requests need to be fully institutionalized and should have an accompanying central office that processes these requests (please see recommendation 2.1).

2.3 Shift lengths

There are certain professions that have similar scheduling needs that require staff to be present 24 hours per day 7 days per week. As an example, nurses need to be present all day, everyday to monitor patients who require consistent care. As a result, nurses usually have scheduled shifts longer than 8 hours such as 12- or 16-hour shifts (Ejebu et al., 2021). Beyond ensuring proper coverage of patients, these longer shifts allow for less commuting, greater work life balance, and more complete days off which can boost morale.

In addition to the nursing profession, other correctional facilities have also cited the need to address staffing issues and have experimented with different schedules to understand the most efficient and

effective staffing schedules. As an example, in June of 2022, Vermont's Department of Corrections piloted a program of 12 hours shifts (2 x 2 x 3) (Cutler, 2022). The results of this pilot study seem overwhelmingly positive with a decrease in post vacancy rate from around 30% a year ago to the current rate of 16.6% (personal communication with Vermont Department of Corrections, 2023). In addition to lower vacancy rates, this pilot program led to preliminary results of employee retention and increased satisfaction in the facilities. This led to an agreement with the local union in April 2023 securing the establishment of the new working shift schedule (Vermont Department of Corrections, 2023).

Indeed, even the most recent Monitor's report highlighted the limits of the current eight hour shifts that DOC assigns and highlights this as compounding other issues related to staff presence at post and overtime ramifications (Martin et al., 2023b). DOC could conduct a feasibility study to explore the dynamics of how long shifts are and a mechanized manner in which the shifts are assigned. The exploratory study could review the length of shift times to include 8 hours, 12 hours, and 16 hours as has been adopted by other correctional departments and professions who have similar workloads and require mandatory presence as illustrated above. The exploration of lengthening shift times could possibly alleviate the excessive overtime and would help to ensure that uniform parents find sufficient and consistent childcare coverage rather than scrambling at the last minute to find coverage due to last minute changes. This could also lead to retention of employees and an overall increase in staff morale. However, by the Monitor's own admission, discussions with the Union would need to occur related to contractual changes regarding shift hours and overtime (Martin et al., 2023b).

2.4 Scheduling consistency

Schedules should be provided with more consistency and in a timely manner. It would be best to ensure that uniform staff are assigned shifts that provide them with more consistent days that they are working and days that they have off. Due to school and extracurricular schedules of children as well as ensuring the scheduling of childcare coverage, this is an important dynamic as a parent.

2.5 Standardization

As highlighted above, there should be standardization of assignment of shifts to prevent instances of favoritism and nepotism that was often cited during the focus group discussions as well as the survey comments.

3. Overtime

3.1 Problem facilities

It would be beneficial for DOC to further explore problem facilities related to overtime. A staffing analysis or further exploration of overtime issues for each facility could allow for a targeted approach to addressing overtime. As noted, each facility's overtime issues should further explore the ratio of correction officers to persons in custody (PIC) as well as understand staffing needs. Each facility might have different staffing issues and needs and as a result, each facility would possibly require different interventions related to overtime issues.

3.2 Address overtime issues

DOC needs to limit the number of hours of overtime that correction officers must work or provide some relief for those correction officers who would not want to accrue excessive overtime hours. Some of these issues could be resolved with the inclusion of scheduling reform (see recommendation 2.3). However, overtime is a problem for uniform and non-uniform staff and should be addressed.

4. Cultural change

4.1 Leadership to treat employees with respect

DOC leadership should treat employees with respect at all times. It is important to create an atmosphere that boosts the morale of uniform staff throughout all facilities and units.

4.2 Training of leadership

To ensure that leadership treat employees with respect, additional training should be mandated to include creating a welcoming work environment as well as a work environment that addresses any concerns that employees raise.

5. Childcare assistance

5.1 Partnerships with local childcare facilities

DOC should form partnerships with childcare facilities that COs already use and make a list of childcare facilities that are available and would be receptive to the needs of uniform parents. This would include facilities that have lengthened hours or flexible hours for parents who have non-traditional work schedules. These facilities should also be willing to work with uniform parents in the event that a uniform parent was asked to do unscheduled overtime and had to make last minute changes to existing childcare arrangements. Additionally, uniform parents should have the ability to access some form of communication to connect with relevant external stakeholders related to scheduling changes resulting in a change in childcare arrangements (see recommendation 6.1). Finally, a list of participating childcare facilities would be provided for all uniform parents.

5.2 Childcare cost coverage

DOC could help to alleviate the costs of childcare by providing certain voucher programs that help to cover some costs incurred due to childcare needs. DOC could dedicate certain funds by providing a grant, voucher, or certain financial benefits that help to cover the costs of childcare incurred by placing children in a commercial childcare facility. This can be supplemented with flex account availability (see recommendation 1.2). This would help to ease the extensive cost burden that uniform parents confront related to providing for their children. This could also possibly help recruitment and retention efforts as well.

5.3. Provision of childcare facilities

DOC could open and manage a childcare facility that is dedicated to all employees. This childcare facility would be open 24 hours, 7 days a week, and would be appropriately staffed with individuals who are familiar with DOC's mission and goals. This facility could be provided somewhere near Rikers.

Recently, the San Diego Police Department established a childcare facility for their law enforcement officers due to similar issues of non-traditional scheduling times, unexpected work hours, and lack of access to childcare. The costs to these parents is 50% of the market rate and a 20% increase above market salaries for employees at this facility (The City of San Diego Police Department, 2022).

It would be important to explore options related to the cost of investment in such a provision as well as the length of time it would take to design, build, or adapt from existing resources. It would also be important to explore this option through the Borough Based Jail Program to understand which childcare facilities could be used for uniform staff working in facilities located in certain neighborhoods once DOC

facilities and administrative staff have decentralized services and transitioned from Rikers. Finally, similar to other recommendations as outlined in this report, the adoption of this recommendation could also help with recruitment and retention of uniform staff.

5.4 Legislative support for uniform parents

The issue of lack of access to childcare has been recognized by the U.S. Congress as legislation has been introduced in the House related to assisting law enforcement officers to access childcare services. H.R. 2722 entitled, Providing Child Care for Police Officers Act of 2023, provides financial support through grants for the establishment of childcare facilities as well as data reporting requirements for law enforcement officers. The introduction of the bill specifically acknowledges a need to accommodate law enforcement officers' "shift work and abnormal work hours..." by providing financial assistance with regards to establishing a dedicated childcare facility.

The feasibility of engaging in a national effort related to this endeavor would be difficult for the Department to influence. However, at a local level, the Department could work with other relevant city agencies (i.e New York City Police Department and New York City Fire Department) as well as other relevant and interested stakeholders such as city council members and union leaders to drum up support as well as advocacy efforts related to similar legislative approaches to address the issue of lack of access to childcare facilities for uniform parents.

6. Miscellaneous recommendation

6.1 Access to a phone line specifically for family emergencies

Currently, if an officer is tasked to remain at post for unscheduled overtime at last minute, the officer has limited ability to connect with external stakeholders regarding last minute scheduling changes. If the officer is a uniform parent and requires changes to childcare arrangements due to last minute overtime requests, the officer does not have access to his/her/their phone and is limited in connecting with external stakeholders regarding the scheduling changes. However, each post in each facility has a phone available that can only connect with the command center of that facility. Therefore, the current line of communication for the uniform parent is to use the phone at post to call the command center to request an outside line that would be used to connect with any entity that would be responsible for childcare coverage.

Each DOC PIC housing facility contains a control center, and there are three officers assigned to each: 1) an officer assigned to administrative tasks; 2) an officer assigned to equipment monitoring and; 3) an officer assigned to gate and access monitoring. While these roles seem distinctive, realistically, all officers in the control center are multi-tasking and ensuring that the facility is running efficiently and effectively. However, as a result, there can be periods of time in which phone calls may or may not be answered in a timely manner. As an example, in the event that a uniform parent is asked to remain at post for unscheduled overtime, the uniform parent may be unable to connect with external stakeholders successfully due to the dynamics and limitations of the control center, especially around a change in shift times.

While access to a phone line is a seemingly easy fix, there are numerous dynamics related to this recommendation. Historically, outside phone lines for correction officers had been available at each post. However, this phone line availability was abused by uniform staff and access to the phone line was revoked by the Department. Discussions then reverted to the exploration of a dedicated phone line for

emergencies. However, after consulting with experts, it seems this offer could become confusing to uniform staff.

DOC could provide a dedicated phone line for each facility that is specifically to communicate issues for family emergencies only. DOC could also provide a line for external stakeholders dedicated to facilitate communication from the outside environment. In other words, in the event that a childcare facility would like to communicate updates or information about any children of uniform staff, the childcare facility could call a specific number that is set up to communicate with uniform staff in the facilities who may not have access to a phone or other form of communication.

As a result, it is recommended that one extra staff member be assigned to the control room to provide sufficient coverage for the phone lines and the calls that are coming into and out of the facility. It would also be important to explore other options to try to understand how other correctional institutions with similar settings have addressed this issue.

Recommended next steps

To address the concerns and challenges of uniform parents, the most successful approach would be multi-pronged by adopting more than one of the outlined recommendations to successfully address the specific challenges that uniform parents encounter. Adopting recommendations could also benefit DOC employees who are non-uniform as well as outlined above.

There are four recommended next steps to include the following:

1. DOC should conduct a feasibility assessment that can prioritize the above-listed recommendations to understand which would have the greatest impact with the least amount of time and financial investment. There is at least one recommendation that can be implemented immediately to address issues in the short-term while also exploring long-term options (see recommendation 2.1 Return of the Uniform Spouse Policy).
2. DOC should also update the above listed recommendations to identify relevant stakeholders, the cost of implementation, and the timeframe of how long it would take to implement such programs to address the needs of uniform parents as well as non-uniform parents. Access to childcare is a national crisis, and DOC is in a unique position to address these problems by implementing certain policies and programs to alleviate the issues that uniform and non-uniform staff encounter as parents.
3. DOC should set up meetings with external stakeholders to discuss proposed solutions that others could review and adopt as well as discuss other ideas for how to address challenges that uniform staff encounter when trying to access childcare.
4. DOC should explore the remaining recommendations with the intent to seriously address the concerns of uniform parents. This would provide much needed relief among uniform parents and would also hopefully address some of the morale issues that the Department is currently facing. Additionally, DOC should ensure that these changes be available to uniform and non-uniform staff as both categories of employees have similar issues when trying to access childcare.

DOC is in a unique position to address these issues due to the continued dedication of leadership to address major institutional problems. Should these recommendations be adopted and implemented, they

should be institutionalized so that changes do not occur with a change in the administration. In other words, there is a risk that the different programs that are implemented be successful but will possibly not be long-lasting due to the potential change in leadership within DOC and also in the Mayor's office. As a result, any adopted and implemented changes need to be fully institutionalized.

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