

Apr. 22, 2006
Copyright © Las Vegas Review-Journal

NEVADA STATE PRISON: Working conditions protested

Correctional officers stage rally

By [ED VOGEL](#)
[REVIEW-JOURNAL CAPITAL BUREAU](#)

CARSON CITY -- With the sounds of the Rolling Stones blaring over a loudspeaker, 80 workers demonstrated Friday against what they called an intolerable working atmosphere at Nevada State Prison.

The rally was attended by five correctional officers from Southern Nevada who complained of similar problems.

Scott MacKenzie, executive director of the State of Nevada Employees Association, said that if the Corrections Department does not resolve the complaints of correctional officers, then the security of the public will be jeopardized. He promised to take other unspecified actions if needed to secure concessions from the prison administration.

Several of the protesters said the demonstration was the first ever held by guards at the 140-year-old state prison, one of the oldest buildings in Carson City.

John Carter, an 18-year correctional officer who organized the protest, said there has been a lack of respect toward guards and their rights in regard to working conditions since William Donat was appointed warden in the fall.

"It is about dignity, it is about respect and it is about abuse of authority," Carter said of the reasons for the protest. "It is about the administration failing to keep commitments."

He said that correctional officers are seen as malingerers if they use state-allowed sick time and that they are denied the opportunity to choose when they take vacation time. They are entitled to 15 days of sick leave and a minimum of 15 days of vacation each year.

But he contended that they are harassed if they use more than 11 days of sick leave a year, and he said their vacation requests often are rejected.

Carter and other guards said the problem has been exacerbated by the reluctance of the prison administration to hire additional guards to ensure that the prison is fully staffed.

Contacted at his office, Corrections Department Director Glen Whorton said the prisons have hired as many workers as they are permitted under their budget. He added that the Legislature, not Donat, decided how many people will be working at Nevada State Prison.

"It is an issue to address when we return to the Legislature (next year)," Whorton said.

"That is the appropriate venue for them."

In recent months, the prison administration has taken away refrigerators and hot plates from guards, according to Carter.

He said they need such items because they work eight- or 12-hour shifts without a designated time for lunch, and they must try to work lunch in during spare time on their shifts.

Carter said that under a court decision, the prison administration must "meet and confer" with employees before making changes in working conditions.

But in response, Whorton said he has followed the "meet and confer" decision and meets regularly with the union, including a meeting on Friday.

The Southern Nevada correctional officers maintained that they face the same problems as the guards in Carson City.

Daryl Vann, a Southern Desert Correctional Center guard, said there would not be a problem in scheduling vacations and taking sick leave if the administration hired enough guards.

"They are not filling the positions they are required to fill," he said.

"If they filled them up, there would not be as much of a problem."

Find this article at:

http://www.reviewjournal.com/lvrj_home/2006/Apr-22-Sat-2006/news/6987479.html

☐ Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright ? Las Vegas Review-Journal, 1997 - 2007