

## Department of Corrections Human Resources Management (Report Highlights)

March 2001

The Human Resources Management program manages the personnel concerns for the entire Department of Corrections. This audit focuses on efforts to hire and retain a sufficient number of correctional officers.

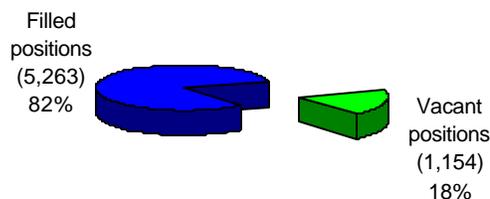
**Our Conclusions:** The Department's high correctional officer vacancy rate is preventing it from fully opening its newest prison while costing the State millions of dollars in overtime. Although the Department has taken aggressive measures to expand recruiting, it still has difficulty filling positions. And, faced with low salaries, it has difficulty retaining the officers it does have.

### High Vacancy Rate Creates Problems

As of November 2000, more than 1 out of 6 correctional officer positions were vacant.

The three prisons with the highest vacancy and turnover rates—Lewis west of Phoenix, and Florence and Eyman in Florence, require long commutes from the Phoenix and Tucson areas.

**Vacancy Rate**



**Vacancy and Turnover Rates**

Facility	Vacancy <sup>1</sup>	Turnover
Lewis	44.3%	32.6%
Eyman	20.5%	31.9%
Florence	18.6%	28.3%

<sup>1</sup> As of November 27, 2000.

Two key factors contribute to the vacancies:

- **Growth**—New prisons have added 1,375 positions since 1997.
- **Turnover**—The Department had a 25 percent Correctional Officer turnover rate in fiscal year 2000.

Other factors, such as the strong economy and a low unemployment rate, also affect vacancies.

Between growth and turnover, the Department had to fill almost 5,000 positions between January 1997 and November 2000.

◆————◆  
*More than one-third of the officers  
now have less than one year's  
experience on the job.*  
◆————◆

**Vacancies and turnover affect prison operations**—Some of these problems include:

- **Unused beds**—Over 1,270 beds (30 percent) in the new Lewis prison cannot be used.
- **Restricted operations**—Some prison units may be “locked down” during some shifts.
- **Overtime**—The Department must pay over \$10 million per year in overtime.
- **Recruiting costs**—It costs over \$9,600 to recruit and train each new officer.
- **Staff “burn out”**—Vacancies lead to high amounts of overtime, which leads to further turnover.

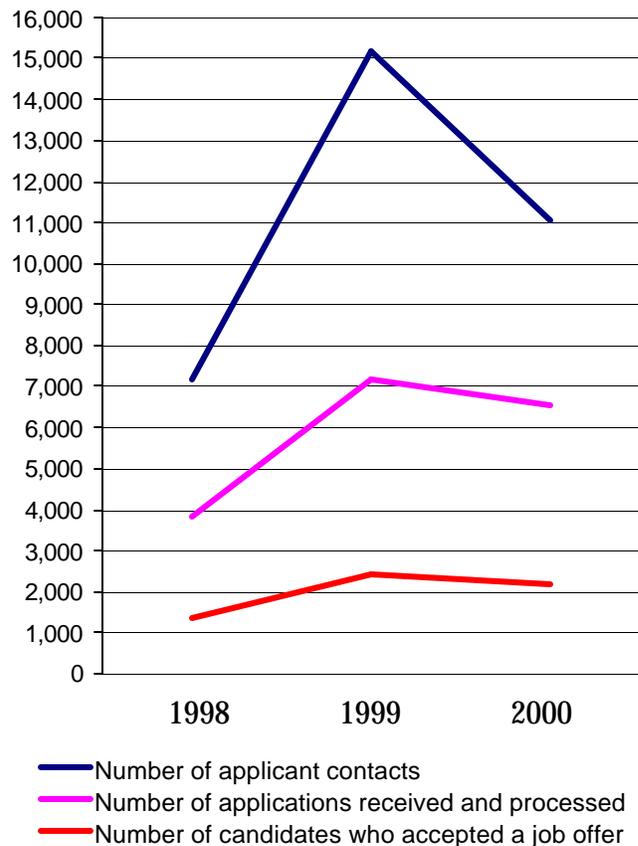
**Recruiting Improves, but Still Falls Short**

**The Department has taken aggressive measures to recruit correctional officers**—Since 1998 the Department has implemented:

- **An aggressive advertising campaign**—Ads are run on billboards, radios, and in newspapers.
- **Incentive pay**—For example, the Department now pays a \$5,160 signing bonus to work at Lewis. Existing Lewis employees also earn an extra \$100/pay period.
- **An employee referral program**—Correctional officers are rewarded for referring two applicants who graduate from the academy.
- **Out-of-state recruiting**—The Department recruits in states such as California, New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma.

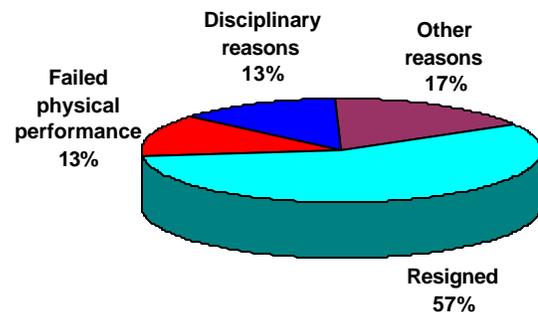
**Efforts have increased job offers**—Although the results fall short of what is still needed, the Department’s efforts have produced more job applicants.

**Recruiting Results**



However, in spite of these efforts, 27 percent of persons who accepted job offers in fiscal year 2000 either failed to enroll or complete the academy.

**Reasons For Not Completing the Academy**



**The Department should consider additional ideas:**

- ✓ Provide a direct link on the Department's Web site to the hiring unit and a more detailed job description.
- ✓ Expand the employee referral incentive program to all staff rather than just correctional officers.
- ✓ Regularly research ways to try to improve the academy graduation rates.

**Faced with Low Salaries, the Department Has Expanded Efforts to Reduce Turnover**

**Factors contributing to turnover:**

- Salaries— studies show salaries are the #1 reason for turnover.
- Benefits — other law enforcement agencies have 20-year rather than 25-year retirement plans.
- Dissatisfaction with commuting, overtime, perceived lack of management support.
- Poor job "fit" — 30 percent resign before 1 year on job.

**The Department has adopted a variety of retention measures:**

- Used vacancy savings to increase salaries by 10-15 percent at hard-to-staff facilities.
- Petitioned the Legislature for increased salaries and competitive retirement benefits

- Provided other benefits such as tuition assistance and vanpools.
- Conducted a "quality-of-worklife" study to identify problems affecting retention.
- Researched child care options and benefits for employees.

**The Department should:**

- ✓ Examine its prescreening processes to ensure applicants receive a realistic understanding of the work.
- ✓ Continue to try to improve salaries and benefits.
- ✓ Follow up on data from the Quality of Worklife Study and exit interviews.

**To Obtain More Information**

- A copy of the full report can be obtained by calling (602) 553-0333 or by visiting our Web site at:

[www.auditor.gen.state.az.us](http://www.auditor.gen.state.az.us)

- The contact person for this report is **Shan Hays**.