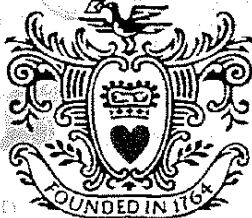


Tenth Anniversary

Best
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April 10, 2006

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Inmate Suicides Should Not Surprise

In response to the July 28 editorial "A Shameful Suicide Record":

Admittedly, it is tragic when an inmate takes his or her own life, but what did Connecticut residents expect after former Gov. John Rowland closed the residential mental health care institutions?

The members we represent were never trained to handle mentally ill and sometimes violent individuals. This issue is never going away despite measures that include touring the cell block every 15 minutes. This has obviously had no effect, because the reality is that life inside a prison is busier than expected. We are staffed at the bare minimum while trying to provide all the constitutional freedoms to those incarcerated; and to include all-day running of recreation, legal calls, social and conjugal visits, file reviews, programming, medical issues and the occasional disruption caused by assaults on staff and inmates.

Until Connecticut builds or reopens mental health institutions for its residents with mental illnesses, this problem will only worsen.

It should also be noted that the number of correction staff members committing

suicide is in close proximity to the number recorded by Connecticut inmates over the last two years. To me, this is a very personal and disturbing issue. I have heard no outcry about this. I have seen no blue ribbon commission formed to study this issue. What I do see are the members I represent labeled as uncaring and abusive. Nothing could be further from the truth.

You don't hear about the number of suicides prevented by correction staff, or about the number of inmate lives saved by correction officers each year.

In the rush to prevent inmate suicides, I would call on Gov. M. Jodi Rell and Correction Commissioner Theresa Lantz to also address suicide among Connecticut's prison employees.

JON T. PEPE
President
State Prison
Employees Union
AFSCME Local 391
Enfield

The writer is a correction officer at Northern Correctional Institution in Somers.

