

## Inmates attack prison guards in Somers

Prison on lockdown; union official calls for move some inmates to another facility

By Laura F. Alix

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SOMERS — Northern Correctional Institution is on lockdown again today after two inmates assaulted several correctional officers late Wednesday morning.

It's the second serious assault at Northern since Dec. 23 when an inmate slashed a correctional officer in the neck with a makeshift knife, and it has one prison union official calling on the state Correction Department to move certain inmates out of Northern, the state's maximum-security prison, and into another facility.

"Something needs to be done. Our staff are tired of being the targets, being the punching bags," said Jon T. Pepe, president of the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees Local 391, the union representing employees at prisons in Enfield, Suffield, and Somers.

Correction Department spokesman Brian Garnett said that Wednesday's assault occurred around 11:30 a.m. as two correctional officers were escorting two inmates out of their cell to recreation.

Garnett said the inmates were wearing

restraints and charged at the correctional officers, striking them with the restraints. Other correctional staff responded to subdue the inmates, he said.

Four correctional officers were treated for injuries. Two were injured in the assault, and two were injured while responding to assist the other officers, Garnett said.

He said today that all the officers were treated at an outside medical facility and released.

"This is the second serious attack on correction officers up at Northern," Pepe said Wednesday. "I believe this is a pattern that's going to continue."

Pepe called on the Correction Department to remove all non-level five inmates from Northern and reopen the Webster Correctional Institution in Cheshire to house them there.

Pepe said he will be formally making that request to the administration at Northern and to Brian Murphy, acting commissioner of the Correction Department.

His proposal would leave only level five inmates and special needs inmates at Northern. The levels refer to the level of security a particular inmate is designated as

needing, Pepe explained. Inmates labeled by the Correction Department as level five are those that need to be housed in a maximum-security facility.

"I've been in here 19 years, and I'm listening to the staff, and they really want more restrictions and less privileges for the inmates up there," Pepe said. "They feel that these inmates are getting more privileges than they deserve. They feel they can attack the officers without any repercussions."

Rep. Karen Jarmoc, D-Enfield, said that during a November meeting with Murphy, other state legislators, and other department officials, she expressed concerns about the department's policy of handcuffing inmates in the front.

"When inmates are cuffed in front, they have a clear opportunity to use their hands and the cuffs as a weapon. Officers have been expressing this concern for quite some time," Jarmoc said.

She said that in light of Wednesday's assault, she hopes the department will review its policy of handcuffing inmates in the front, and she's optimistic that such a review will take place.

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"I would say that the Department of Correction has been very receptive as of late," Jarmoc said. "There has been a lot of positive change, so I don't want this most recent incident to give an impression that there has not been positive change."

Sen. John Kissel, R-Enfield, said in a prepared statement that he had recently spoken with Murphy and agreed there should be a follow-up meeting to the November meeting

between legislators and department officials.

Northern Correctional Institution was placed on lockdown after the Dec. 23 assault.

Garnett said the facility came off of that lockdown last week, but it was placed on lockdown again because of Wednesday's assault.

State police were called in to investigate and pursue criminal charges, Garnett said.

He did not identify either the inmates or the correctional officers involved in Wednesday's incident.