



Illinois Ethics Matters

December 13, 2022

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Honesty, Integrity, Service

A newsletter from the Office of Executive Inspector General for the Agencies
of the Illinois Governor

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Announcements

- The OEIG is pleased to announce the hiring of **Steve Helmich** as an Investigator in its Springfield office.

OEIG Investigation Describes Systemic Misconduct at Pontiac Correctional Center

An OEIG investigative report, initially issued to the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) in October 2020, was recently publicly released. The investigation revealed systemic misconduct at the Pontiac Correctional Center resulting in the discipline or termination of multiple IDOC employees.

Based on its investigation, the OEIG learned that when a newer IDOC employee attempted to report an inmate who had performed a sex act, an IDOC Lieutenant directed the employee to draw a depiction of this act using a fictitious IDOC form. Unbeknownst to the employee, this fictitious form was not part of IDOC protocol but instead was done for the Lieutenant's and others' amusement. The fictitious form was then shared with an extensive number of other IDOC employees to further the "joke," including other Lieutenants, Majors, Assistant Wardens, and the Warden, who either joined in or failed to take any timely action to put a stop to this wrongdoing.

In the months following the widespread dissemination of the form at Pontiac, the employee experienced numerous incidents of harassment, including anti-gay slurs, prank calls at work, graffiti with sexual connotations about him, and one incident in which a coworker pressed his body against him. The employee repeatedly reported the harassment he experienced to IDOC managers and administrators. Although the employee's written submissions detailing the prank and subsequent harassment were referred to IDOC's Office of Affirmative Action and specifically stated that he believed he was being harassed based on his perceived sexual orientation, Affirmative Action elected not to open an investigation, stating that no covered class had been established. While the complaints were pending with Affirmative Action, the employee was reassigned to duty in the facility's towers, and the harassment continued. On multiple occasions, the employee requested a hardship transfer to another IDOC facility, but those requests were denied, and the employee ultimately left IDOC.

Based on this investigation, the OEIG found that: Pontiac managers engaged in conduct unbecoming of IDOC supervisors; the employee was subjected to a hostile work environment at Pontiac, for which IDOC was responsible; the Pontiac Warden mismanaged the facility; and the Affirmative Action Administrator committed misfeasance by failing to investigate the harassment complaints.

As noted in the report: "Prisons are already difficult and dangerous working environments, where staff face challenges posed by inmate misconduct on a daily basis. It is entirely unacceptable that staff at Pontiac Correctional Center also suffer mistreatment at work by their own coworkers and supervisors, due to the unprofessional working environment that flourishes there." OEIG Case No. 19-01177 is available on the OEIG's website [here](http://www.inspectorgeneral.illinois.gov).