



Vermont State Employees' Association

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January 25, 2023

Commissioner Nicolas Deml
NOB #2 South, 280 State Drive
Waterbury, VT 05671-2000

Dear Commissioner Nicolas Deml:

Please find attached a letter of no confidence in Superintendent Lori Perkins. This letter is sent after serious consideration and genuine concern. I urge your immediate attention to this matter. This is a grave and dire situation. Please schedule a meeting with these employees immediately.

We are requesting a response from the Administration, no later than Thursday, February 2, 2023. Out of professional courtesy, with the intention to provide you the opportunity to respond, we will refrain from sharing this information with the public until then.

Sincerely,

Steve Howard
VSEA Executive Director

cc: Governor Philip B. Scott

Nicholas J. Deml
Commissioner
Vermont Department of Corrections

We, the undersigned employees at Northern State Correctional Facility, respectfully submit this letter as our official Vote of No Confidence in Superintendent Lori Perkins. A petition was circulated, and a vote was conducted among staff, which includes Facility Supervisors, Correctional Officer I and IIs, Correctional Services Specialists and administrative staff. **The Vote of No Confidence was overwhelming.**

We write this letter with great hesitation, and only after much discussion and contemplation. We hesitate because we consider ourselves dedicated and trained individuals, and more importantly, as a team and it goes against our nature to break the chain of command. We also hesitate because we fully believe that if this letter does not effect change, we will suffer retaliation, be it overt or subtle. We risk ultimately paying a high price for doing what we know in our hearts is the right thing to do for the facility.

Northern State is the largest facility in the state and has been in operation since 1994. Since opening many staff have come and gone but one thing remains is that we always treated each other as family. We looked out of one another every day knowing someone had our backs.

Over the past several months we have been disheartened by the actions of Superintendent Lori Perkins. Under her leadership morale has plummeted to depths never seen at this facility. Through her inaction staff question whether working conditions will ever improve. We question the leadership qualities of Superintendent Lori Perkins because we have witnessed her inaction numerous times when information was brought to her attention regarding staff safety, staff scheduling and inadequate staffing.

Superintendent Perkins has made no attempt to address any of our concerns, either through Labor/Management meetings or working with a staff member to fix. Even though our facility is large, staff, like any family, talk among ourselves, and we are constantly venting our frustrations to each other. Staff at NSCF are forced to work 16-hour days, day-in and day-out. Staff report posts being collapsed or incidents of one officer having to man two posts at once. Apart from creating safety concerns, these decisions cause great mental and physical stress on staff and in turn on their families. Staff read and sign their Post Orders daily, knowing that Superintendent Perkins will direct us to violate our Post Orders and make it impossible to perform all our assigned duties.

Superintendent Lori Perkins has not created a safer work environment, but rather has created a toxic environment for both incarcerated individuals and staff. Superintendent Perkins' unwillingness to listen to her experienced and trained staff has demonstrated there is no hope for learning or improvement, thus no moving forward. Listed below are ongoing crises that could endanger lives, which have gone unresolved under Superintendent Perkins:

- Short staffing causes incarcerated individuals to be locked in, not allowing recreation which causes stress on the incarcerated individual and staff.
- Short staffing creates up to six posts vacant each shift, even after all available staff have been ordered to work more than their current twelve-hour shift. (this could be more or less depending on the day)
- Facility Supervisors are required to run the facility and man a post because of vacant slots. This causes a dangerous situation in an emergency where there will be limited responders
- State employees are being brought into the facility to run a Post without any training with many never having worked inside a facility, not even knowing what rules/expectations/directives or post orders that need to be followed. This is a liability for those staff and for their coworkers when they are not trained on the basic core competencies. (Examples: Suicide prevention, fire safety, observation checks.)
- Collapsing Post One, the vehicle that tours around the facility. This endangers all staff, I/I's and the community if an escape occurs or should a trespasser enter the grounds with a weapon. Although this didn't happen the fact that this was even considered is atrocious and a complete disregard for staff/ I/I and the community's safety.
- Denying leave requests: the leave allotment has been unilaterally reduced by 40 percent, from five slots per day to three. This greatly impacts staff's ability to mentally and physically heal, and takes away time with their family.
- Allowed staff to alter or change schedules even after agreeing with the VSEA that once the matrix was set for shift bidding there would be no changes, and in some cases making back door deals with staff to switch shifts to help out some of the staffing by telling them they'll be able to stay on those shifts then denying them that opportunity when staffing got better with the latest academy class.
 - Superintendent Perkins can bring her own dogs in for emotional support to the facility, however when staff are in need of support, she just refers them to the EAP helpline even though the number was not working, instead of reaching out to some staff individually when help was needed.
 - Superintendent Perkins has put the entire facility and specifically the administrative staff's safety at risk when she pulled the A1 Security Officer that has been in place at the facility for over a decade. This places untrained admin staff, though no fault of their own, to deal with security related details and tasks that are normally reserved for the A1 Security Officer such as inspecting potential contraband items into the facility and facility traffic and entrance protocols for staff/visitors/attorneys and contractors alike.
 - There have been several occasions where Superintendent Perkins was notified of scheduling issues and told supervisors to basically "deal with it" and hung up the phone instead of providing any sort of input or assistance.

- Superintendent Perkins over the summer months on numerous occasions was difficult to contact and most of the times deferred any notifications to the Assistant Superintendents.
- Superintendent Perkins consistently found it difficult to be at the facility for 8 hours on any given day during the summer and fall months while many of her staff were still forced into 16 hours shifts and 8 hour turn arounds.
- Seldomly does Superintendent Perkins tour the actual secure portion of the facility to include living units unless Central Office staff or auditors are present at the facility.
- Superintendent Perkins has eroded the Labor Management Committee at the facility, as this is supposed to be a once a month meeting and has now pushed this back to once a quarter meeting. This makes bringing up difficult, but meaning full conversations a priority which we feel is a possibility as to why these meetings have been moved the way they have.
- On several occasions mandated the booking officer to run both booking and Segregation with 15-minute checks on top of manning one of the busiest posts at the facility which also covers the med staff area and controlling who comes in and out.
- Superintendent Perkins "assisted" in helping fill vacancies when there was no other means of covering those vacancies during the summer months, very seldomly and more often than not relying heavily on the on call list. Meanwhile all other available staff were being ordered over or in on their days off to assist and cover vacancies while not allowing them time off from work. This included Assistant Superintendents and the SOS numerous times helping to fill those voids but the Superintendent was no where to be seen. Instead of leading by example it became " Do as I say" leadership.
- Very recently a situation occurred involving a Close Custody and dangerous/assaultive I/I going out on a transport that he was made aware of by an outside source. Given this information the decision from Superintendent Perkins was to just run the transport like normal putting those two staff in Jeopardy of a potential ambush. Staff could have been sent either armed or with an extra staff member or even cancelled the trip, but instead the focus was making sure the I/I received the treatment they needed and nothing about staff safety. This was a blatant and clear demonstration that staff safety is no where near important to Superintendent Perkins. You should never feel safe in correctional setting, but this was as dangerous as dangerous gets. Luckily the trip had no issues but eventually luck runs out.

- Superintendent Perkins recently violated the leave policy by allowing a staff member with much less seniority to take time off on a holiday and to use annual leave who had already been denied leave when several staff members with more seniority were denied that opportunity as well due to leave being reduced , so instead of going to the next person in seniority to allow the holiday off, she chose to allow that to occur.
- NSCF has had 2, soon to be 3 executive job opportunities open up with minimal applications, why is that? These positions should be flooded with quality candidates chomping at the bit for these and yet there is not.

Within the last 2 months two key staff have resigned from her executive team, one was the Asst. Superintendent and the other was the Chief of Security; both were excellent leaders and respected by staff, as well as 1 CSS with an enormous sense of facility and state policies/protocols. Staff believe these resignations were due to them being denied input and being shut down by Superintendent Lori Perkins. We feel she inconsistently applies policy and protocol and has an ongoing and uncorrected lack of respect towards all staff. The facility cannot be run successfully with a leader that fails to respect staff that report to her. Even when Superintendent Perkins asks for staff input there is a failure to follow through or a total disregard for the ideas provided.

In closing we would like to remind you that we are not troublemakers or disgruntled employees. We are the heart and souls of this facility and want to enjoy coming to work each day feeling safe and secure knowing our input is valued and respected. Knowing that each day we can make a difference that affects the positive staff and inmate growth here at Northern State Correctional Facility.

Based on the totality of the circumstances, the dedicated staff at Northern State tenders this letter of no confidence in Superintendent Lori Perkins and ask that Superintendent Lori Perkins be removed from her position.

Attached is the list of employees supporting this change in leadership: