

THE OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE

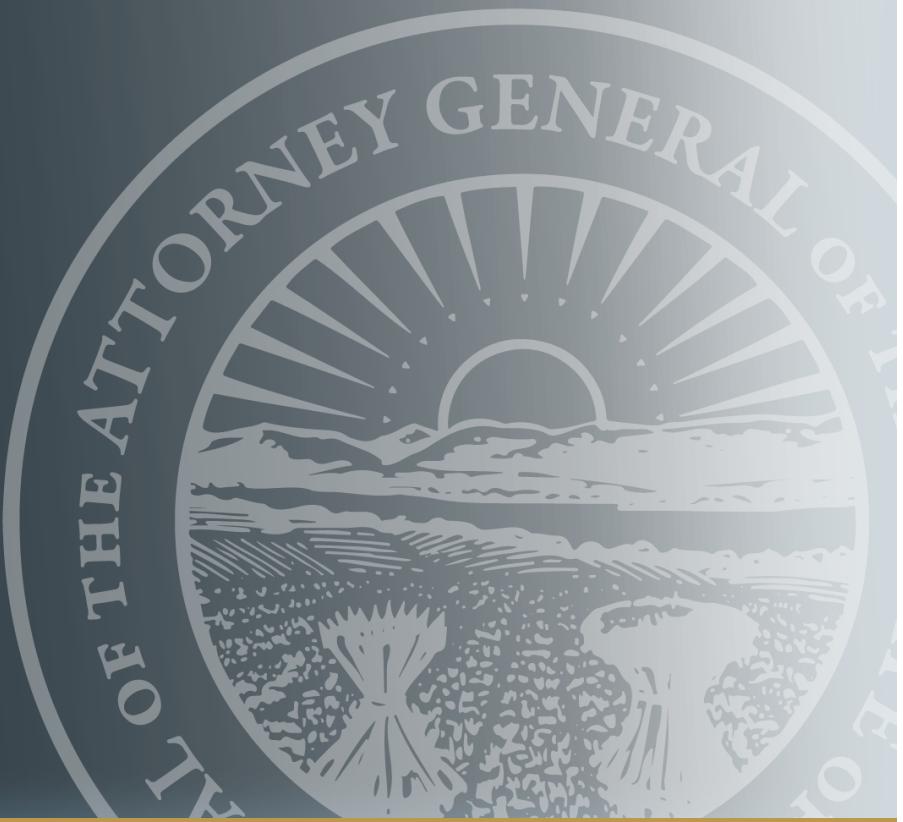
2025 ANNUAL REPORT

CORRECTIONAL FACILITY INSPECTION SERVICES



DAVE YOST

OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL





The Attorney General's Office
protects Ohio and its families.

Our actions are driven by their interests,
guided by the rule of law
and the relentless pursuit of justice.

We seek to constrain evil and empower good,
without partisan preference
or subjective judgment, as defined
by the law and by the Constitutions
of the United States and Ohio.



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INTRODUCTION

The Ohio Attorney General's Office (AGO) provides this report to the Ohio General Assembly in accordance with Ohio Revised Code Section 109.39. This section requires the AGO to submit to the General Assembly, no later than Jan. 31, a report of the Correctional Facility Inspection Services' (CFIS) findings from the previous calendar year. CFIS was established by the state's 2025-27 biennial budget bill, effective Sept. 30, 2025. Thus, CFIS existed only for about 12 weeks in 2025. During that time, it worked to engage with the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) and the Department of Youth Services (DYS), and to inspect the correctional facilities that its predecessor, the Correctional Institution Inspection Committee (CIIC), did not inspect before it disbanded. This report outlines those efforts and provides background on the AGO's work to establish CFIS.

BACKGROUND

Under the newly enacted R.C. 109.39, CFIS — effective Sept. 30, 2025 — became the primary state office responsible for inspecting Ohio's state correctional institutions, privately operated correctional institutions and youth services facilities. Before that date, CIIC, a joint committee of the General Assembly, was responsible for such inspections, in accordance with R.C. 103.73. In the most recent budget bill, the General Assembly abolished CIIC and re-constituted it within the AGO as CFIS. The operative language in R.C. 109.39 is:

"There is, as a section within the office of the attorney general, an office of correctional facility inspection services. The office shall establish and maintain a continuing program of inspection of each state correctional institution used for the custody, control, training, and rehabilitation of persons convicted of crime and of each private correctional facility; any local correctional institution used for the same purposes, and any youth services facility. Each inspection shall include an evaluation of the inmate grievance procedure, compliance with meal requirements, at least one review of rehabilitative or educational programs, and any other compliance area the office determines is appropriate. Not later than the last day of January of each year, the office shall submit a report of its findings from the previous calendar year to the general assembly in accordance with section 101.68 of the Revised Code."

ESTABLISHMENT OF CFIS

Immediately upon passage of R.C. 109.39, the AGO began establishing CFIS, whose statutory duties, with only minor exceptions, mirror those of CIIC. Thus, the AGO's first step was to meet with CIIC staff members to discuss their work and how it could be transitioned to the newly formed CFIS. (Compare, R.C. 109.39 and R.C. 103.73.) Throughout the transition period, CIIC provided the AGO with access to its historical reports, information and data. In addition to meeting with the CIIC staff, the AGO met separately with representatives from DRC and DYS, and from groups that had previously engaged with CIIC regarding the committee's work. The latter groups included the Children's Law Center, the ACLU of Ohio, the Ohio Public Defender's Office, the Ohio Justice and Policy Center, Ohioans for Youth Justice and the Cuyahoga County Public Defender's Office. During these meetings, AGO staff gathered ideas regarding the newly created CFIS.

In addition to these meetings, the AGO began the process of hiring CFIS staff. Key to the AGO's process was finding personnel with work experience in adult and juvenile correctional facilities. The AGO posted job openings for Inspectors and for the Chief of Inspections. The minimum qualifications in both postings required significant experience in adult or juvenile corrections, among other things. The AGO received a large number of applications from qualified candidates, leading to a competitive process.

After conducting interviews, the AGO determined that CFIS would be best positioned if led by its top two candidates. Thus, the office hired Dr. James Wesson as Chief of Inspections and Ms. Deborah Drummond as Chief Inspector.

Dr. Wesson has 21 years of experience in corrections, most recently serving as Warden's Assistant at Grafton Correctional Institution, a DRC facility. At Grafton Correctional, this executive staff member assumes operational responsibilities in the warden's absence. The warden's assistant also serves as the public information officer and represents the warden in meetings with the staff and the local community.

Ms. Drummond has 28 years of experience with DRC, most recently serving as the Operational Compliance Manager (OCM) at Trumbull Correctional Institution. At DRC institutions, the OCM conducts the facility's independent management audit (IMA), an annual in-depth internal audit of an institution's operations. The IMA reviews a correctional institution's compliance with both American Correctional Association (ACA) standards and Ohio standards for correctional institutions.

Once Dr. Wesson and Ms. Drummond were in place, they began the process of hiring two Inspectors to round out their team. After interviewing numerous candidates, they hired Mr. Derek Thompson and Mr. Bryan Forrest for the positions. Mr. Thompson previously spent 14 years with DRC, most recently as the Operational Compliance Manager at the Ohio Reformatory for Women. Mr. Forrest joined CFIS after 23 years with DYS, most recently serving as the Facility Interventions Administrator (FIA) at the Indian River Juvenile Correctional Facility. The FIA reviews staff uses of force for compliance with DYS policy. Mr. Forrest was also a DYS instructor in use of force and a master instructor trained on the appropriate use of pepper spray. The CFIS staff is familiar with CIIC's work, having interacted with the committee's inspectors and/or served as the relevant facility's representative during an inspection.

While still working through the hiring process, Dr. Wesson and Ms. Drummond engaged DRC and DYS staff to introduce themselves as representatives of the newly formed CFIS. They also reviewed CIIC's work to determine which facilities had not been inspected before CIIC was disbanded. As a legislative commission, CIIC's annual inspection schedule was voted on and approved in an open meeting and then posted. CFIS determined that CIIC had not conducted inspections scheduled after July 17, 2025, a total of 13 inspections. Dr. Wesson and Ms. Drummond set an aggressive schedule that would allow them to conduct an initial inspection of these facilities by the end of 2025.

INSPECTION METHODOLOGY

The CFIS inspection methodology will be guided by its statutory mandate: to maintain a continuing program of inspection that includes an evaluation of the inmate grievance procedure, compliance with meal requirements, at least one review of rehabilitative or educational programs, and any other compliance area that it determines is appropriate.

Although the first three compliance areas are straightforward, the last area is broad and up to the agency's discretion. For all areas inspected, CFIS staff will determine whether it complies with applicable DRC or DYS

policy. That said, no two DRC or DYS facilities are identical, so there may be compliance areas that CFIS inspects in one facility that are not relevant in another. The CFIS staff can rely on its significant corrections experience to determine what areas are relevant and still remain within the confines of what the General Assembly intended.

CFIS plans to request select documents and reports from DRC and DYS, including grievances, use-of-force reports, food inspection reports, staffing and recruiting reports, educational programming reports and others. The requested documents may change over time and among facilities.

The timing and frequency of CFIS inspections will likely differ from that of CIIC. Like CIIC, CFIS is charged with maintaining a “continuing program of inspections.” But unlike CIIC, which set its inspection schedule through the legislative committee, CFIS has the flexibility to set its own schedule for inspecting and re-inspecting facilities. Institutions will sometimes be given advance notice of inspections. Other times, inspections will be unannounced. For example, for some of the initial inspections conducted at the end of 2025, CFIS staff informed the institution of the inspection less than 24 hours before arriving on-site.

It is not the intention of CFIS to disrupt an institution with a last-minute inspection. However, the CFIS staff has significant experience in representing various institutions during inspections. Based on that experience, the staff believes that occasionally conducting an inspection with short notice will give CFIS a better understanding of the way in which a facility operates from day to day. CFIS might also inspect only one of the statutorily required areas (e.g. the grievance procedure) and leave the other areas for another visit. Finally, CFIS intends to conduct re-inspections of areas found to be deficient or problematic. Regardless of the type, duration or focus of an inspection, or the notice given before arriving, the emphasis will be on maintaining the flexibility to allow for an effective continuing program of inspection. CFIS will continue its dialogue with DRC and DYS as this new inspection process develops.

The initial priority for CFIS was to inspect the 13 DRC correctional institutions that had not been inspected by CIIC in 2025. These facilities, though not inspected in 2025, had all undergone an IMA (conducted by DRC) or an American Correctional Association audit (conducted by national accreditation auditors) in 2024 or 2025.

The initial inspections were designed to help CFIS familiarize itself with the institutions and to ensure that the mandatory areas of inspection (food service, the grievance process and educational/rehabilitative programs) complied with all applicable DRC policies and procedures. CFIS staff also inspected the non-mandatory areas in which deviations from DRC policy could impact the overall conditions of the facility. CFIS provided each institution with roughly 24 hours’ notice of the inspection. Most of the institutions were in full compliance with DRC policy in the mandatory areas of inspection. Any policy deviations were noted, and CFIS will conduct follow-up inspections to ensure that full compliance is reached. Given the limited time available to complete the initial inspections, future inspection procedures, areas of review, and reports may change slightly.

Finally, CFIS set up [a webpage](#) with contact information on the AGO’s website. All CFIS reports will be posted on the site upon completion. It also provided CFIS’ contact information to every DRC institution, and established a process for receiving and responding to correspondence. These communication channels will not replace or supplant any institution’s grievance procedure. If an incarcerated person raises a concern or complaint that should go through the grievance procedure, the inmate will be directed to first follow that process.

CONCLUSION

The Ohio Attorney General's Office began preparing for its new role inspecting Ohio's DRC and DYS facilities as soon as it received its charge from the General Assembly. The newly formed CFIS is staffed by a team of professionals who have a deep understanding of corrections based on their combined decades of experience in the field. They are well-qualified to establish the continuing program of inspection envisioned by the General Assembly.



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