

**REPORT ON THE
INSPECTION OF**

LAKE ERIE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION

INSPECTION DATE: DEC. 10, 2025



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INTRODUCTION

In the state's 2025-27 biennial budget bill, the 136th General Assembly created the Office of Correctional Facility Inspection Services (CFIS) within the Ohio Attorney General's Office. Established by Ohio Revised Code Section 109.39, CFIS – effective Sept. 30, 2025 – became the primary entity responsible for inspecting Ohio's state correctional institutions, privately operated correctional institutions and youth services facilities. Before that date, the Correctional Institution Inspection Committee (CIIC), a joint committee of the General Assembly, was responsible for inspecting Ohio's correctional institutions and youth facilities. The General Assembly abolished the CIIC and re-constituted it as CFIS in the budget bill.

CFIS's duties are set forth in R.C. 109.39(A), which provides:

“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.”

CFIS is not required to provide a correctional institution or youth facility with advance notice of an inspection, pursuant to R.C. 109.39(A). In addition to its mandatory inspection duties, CFIS may assist the attorney general and correctional facility leadership in developing and evaluating programs to improve the condition or operations of the facilities it is required to inspect. R.C. 109.39(B).

Besides the CFIS inspections, each Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) facility undergoes an annual inspection and accreditation by the American Correctional Association (ACA) and an internal management audit (IMA). Although CFIS staff may review and refer to the ACA and IMA findings, CFIS inspections are separate and independent.

To institute the continuing program of inspection required by Ohio law, CFIS, shortly after its formation, began conducting an initial inspection of the DRC and Department of Youth Services (DYS) facilities that had not been inspected by CIIC in 2025. The initial inspections were designed, in part, to help CFIS familiarize itself with each facility, the warden and the staff. Further, each initial inspection allows CFIS to determine what additional data might be needed for future inspections and what inspection methodology is appropriate. This report details the initial inspection of Lake Erie Correctional Institution (LAECI).

GENERAL OVERVIEW

On Dec. 10, 2025, CFIS completed an initial inspection of LAECI. Warden Stephen Reynolds was notified the day before that CFIS inspectors would arrive at 9 a.m. the following day. CFIS inspectors were at LAECI for about four hours. The CFIS team consisted of Dr. James Wesson, chief of inspections, and Deborah Drummond, lead inspector.

LAECI is a minimum-/medium-security-level correctional facility for adult men located in Conneaut, Ohio, in Ashtabula County. The facility is open-dormitory style. Each unit houses roughly 240 incarcerated persons (IPs). LAECI’s maximum capacity is 1,498; on the day of the inspection, it housed 1,780. A DRC facility can seek a waiver from the American Correctional Association to exceed its IP capacity. Additional capacity might be reached by, say, replacing a single bed in a cell with a bunk bed. CFIS verified that LAECI obtained a waiver from the association.

Lake Erie Correctional, which opened in 2000, is privately owned and operated by Core Civic Corp., pursuant to an agreement with ODRC. The facility, though private, is subject to the same requirements and standards as state-owned and -operated correctional institutions.

LAECI’s most recent IMA took place June 10–12, 2025. The annual audit is conducted by an independent auditor, who examines a facility’s compliance with ACA’s 5th Edition Standards and the 2025 Ohio Standards and Observations, in preparation for the next ACA audit. All institutional work, industry and vocational education programs are also audited.

In the 2025 IMA, LAECI was deemed in compliance with all 64 applicable mandatory ACA standards and 434 of the 438 applicable non-mandatory ACA standards. LAECI was in compliance with 49 of the 61 applicable Ohio standards. The table below illustrates LAECI’s rate of compliance with ACA and Ohio Standards over the past three years:

IMA Audit Scores	2025	2024	2023
ACA Mandatory	100%	100%	100%
ACA Non-mandatory	98.8%	99.3%	99.1%
Ohio Standards	80.3%	91%	94.1%

AREAS INSPECTED BY CFIS

Pursuant to R.C. 109.39, CFIS must inspect the grievance process, food services and an educational or a rehabilitative program. In addition, R.C. 109.39 empowers CFIS to inspect any other areas that it deems appropriate. While at LAECI, the CFIS team also inspected:

- Medical services
- Recreation area
- Library/Law library
- Visitation area
- Specialized housing
- Transitional Programming Unit (restrictive housing)

In advance of their arrival, CFIS inspectors requested that the staff provide copies of the previous seven days of administrative duty officer (ADO) reports and the 15 most recent grievances. Upon arrival at the facility, the CFIS team was greeted by the warden’s administrative assistant. After brief introductions in the warden’s conference room, the inspection, led by Warden Reynolds, began.

MANDATED AREAS OF INSPECTION

Grievance process

DRC's grievance process, governed by Ohio Administrative Code Section 5120-9-31, consists of three steps. It begins with an IP filing an informal complaint resolution (ICR) with the supervisor of the area in which the IP has a concern. The IP has 14 calendar days from the date of the incident to file an ICR. The inspector of institution services (IIS) has 14 days to respond and has an option to file an extension. If the complaint is not resolved or the IP is dissatisfied with the inspector's decision, the IP can file a grievance to the IIS within 14 days of the ICR response. Or, in cases in which an IP believes that the warden or the IIS was personally and knowingly involved in a violation of a law, rule or policy – or condoned such a violation – the IP can file a grievance directly to the chief inspector.

The institutional inspector investigates a grievance to determine whether any DRC policy, rule or procedural guideline was violated – and either denies or grants the grievance. If the IP is not satisfied with the inspector's decision, the IP can appeal it to the chief inspector. The Office of the Chief Inspector, housed within DRC's central office, makes the final decision for every grievance appealed from the facility level. R.C. 5120.06.

Each IP is issued a tablet computer with access to ViaPath, the system used by IPs to file a grievance electronically. Paper grievance forms are available for those who prefer a manual process. The grievance process is designed to help address IP complaints regarding any aspect of institutional life, whether the issue relates to the application of policies or procedures, the conditions of confinement or the actions of facility staff.

At LAECI, the CFIS team focused on ensuring that the staff was systematically logging and tracking grievances in ViaPath, staff members were responding promptly to grievances, and grievance responses met policy guidelines. CFIS also looked for any signs of retaliation against IPs who filed grievances, checked to ensure that the appeals process is accessible, looked for trends among grievances, and reviewed grievance responses to ensure that they appropriately cited the correct policy.

All of the grievances reviewed complied with DRC policy regarding response times and citations. Staff members were logging grievances and informal complaints electronically, and the grievance process was found to be accessible on IP tablets. CFIS did not observe any trends in grievances or signs of retaliation against IPs who filed grievances. LAECI's grievance process ran efficiently, and in accordance with DRC policy.

Food services

The food-services area was inspected to ensure compliance with DRC Policy 60-FSM-02, Food Service Operations, and DRC 60-FSM-06, Safety and Health Protection for Staff and Incarcerated Individuals Assigned to Food Service.¹

¹ All DRC policies referenced herein are available at: <https://drc.ohio.gov/about/resource/policies-and-procedures/3-policies-and-procedures>.

Meal sampling

CFIS sampled a lunch of chicken chili, a baked potato, a vegetable blend, cheese sauce, white bread, margarine and pineapples. Temperatures for all items served and for the portions sampled were within DRC Policy 60-FSM-02 (hot foods at or above 140 degrees, cold foods at or below 40 degrees).

Observations

The food-services area was clean and orderly, and the winter menu was posted. Incarcerated food-services workers were appropriately dressed in protective clothing (hair and beard nets, rubber gloves). Uniforms were neat and appeared to be clean. LAECI offers the IN2Work program, designed to teach skills and provide certifications needed for careers in the culinary arts. Participants were actively engaged in meal preparation.

The kitchen tool room was inspected, and all tools were accounted for. Tools not present were replaced with a chit, an object used to mark where the tool should be. A tool control log was being used to indicate the individual to whom the tool was assigned, serving as a safety check. There were no broken tools in the area.

The back-dock area was clean and free of offensive odors. The area surrounding the trash compactor was free of debris. No rodents or pests were observed in the food-services area or on the dock. Coolers and freezers were in proper working order; storage areas were clean and organized. The dish room was clean, and dish-cleaning water temperatures complied with DRC 60-FSM-02. Overall sanitation was appropriate, as proper disinfectants were being used to clean the area. The CFIS team verified completion of sanitation and hygiene training for food-services staff and incarcerated staff, per 60-FSM-06. Safe Serv Certification was also verified.

CFIS spoke to multiple IPs in the food-services area. None reported any concerns that would constitute a violation of DRC policy.

Educational or rehabilitative program

DRC, through the Ohio Central School System (OCSS), offers educational programs designed to meet the needs of IPs. The programs include adult education courses, vocational training and technical training, all of which incorporate technology in the programming. Collectively, the programs are designed to enhance IP employability upon release. On the date of the inspection, LAECI's academic and career programs included:

- Education:
 - Adult basic education
 - General Education Development (GED)
 - Pre-GED
 - Special education
 - Certificates and degrees through Ashland University
- Career/Technical:
 - Administrative office technology
 - Computer-aided drafting

- Computer repair and robotics
- Construction technology/drywall
- Apprenticeships:
 - Animal trainer
 - Culinary arts
 - Electrician
 - Heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC)
 - Landscape management
 - Maintenance repair
 - Tailor

Upon review, LAECI's literacy and GED programs appeared to meet IP needs. The facility's vocational training aligns with current job-market demands. LAECI offers significant post-secondary educational opportunities to IPs, instructors have sufficient qualifications, and the educational materials and technology are current. Enrollment and attendance were being tracked and monitored by staff. Accommodations were available to IPs with learning disabilities. No problems were observed or reported.

NON-MANDATED AREAS OF INSPECTION

Medical services

CFIS toured the medical department and spoke to staff members. The department has a dental area, a pill call area, examination rooms and an infirmary. There is office space for the medical staff (doctor, administrators and nurse practitioners). IPs were receiving medical treatment during the inspection, and the area was extremely clean. There were appropriate health-care and preventative-care memos in the medical area. The medical department was fully staffed.

Recreation area

CFIS toured the recreation department and spoke to the director. The area appeared to prioritize inmate health; it was clean and well-maintained. Weight training and exercise equipment, a full-length basketball court and an outdoor rec area were available for IP use. All equipment appeared to be in good order; no major issues were observed. Appropriate cleaning disinfectants were being used. The restrooms were inspected, with no sanitation issues to report. Toilets, sinks and the water fountain were in good working order. No violations of DRC 77-REC-01, Recreation and Leisure Time Activities, were observed or reported.

Library/Law library

LAECI's library, which includes a law library, appeared to be clean and organized. IPs were able to access LexisNexis as well as Ohio Means Jobs, a program that provides specialized employment services, including re-entry resume services. The librarian was knowledgeable and expressed pride in her area. Re-entry information and hours of operation were posted. No violations of DRC 58-LIB-01, Comprehensive Library Services, were observed or reported.

Visitation area

LAECI's visitation area provided IPs and their families a setting that encourages positive interaction among family members, especially children. A children's area featured games and books. The visitation area was clean and organized and had a vending area where visitors could buy snacks. No violations of DRC 76-VIS-01, Incarcerated Person (IP) Visitation, were observed or reported.

Specialized housing

CFIS inspected the Huron A/B housing unit. This specialized housing unit focuses on rehabilitation through peer support and structured programming, with a specific concentration on addiction-related issues. The unit emphasizes group therapy and personal development. A recovery services staff member was present in the unit to support the residents. No violations of DRC policy were observed or reported.

Transitional Programing Unit (TPU)

The TPU, a restrictive housing area, was clean and orderly. Inspectors verified that IPs in the unit had access to their tablets. A peer-support team was present and actively engaged. Peer supporters are IPs trained by the Ohio Department of Behavioral Health to assist IPs who may be in crisis. Peer supporters use their training and their shared experiences with mental-health and/or substance-use issues to help other IPs. Support occurs within the housing unit – outside the clinical setting – and is meant to promote sustained recovery. Peer supporters also can become certified prior to release, enhancing their employability.

The unit offered adequate reading materials and religious services. Recovery services (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous) and mental-health programs were also offered. CFIS inspectors verified via the sign-in log, DRC 6011, that executive staff were conducting rounds on time, according to 50-PAM-02. No sanitation issues were reported or observed. Cells that were inspected were in appropriate condition. The TPU laundry area was clean and organized; proper cleaning products were being used.

CFIS reviewed multiple DRC 4118 reports, which document each IP's essential daily functions, such as acceptance or refusal of meals, personal hygiene and recreational activities. Each DRC 4118 is signed or initialed by a staff member as confirmation that these necessities have been provided. Of the 4118s reviewed, most sections had been properly completed, with the exception of the daily required signatures from medical personnel. On one day, medical personnel failed to initial the DRC 4118s.

As a follow-up, CFIS staff asked LAECI to provide the DRC 6011 for the same day -- to verify, at a minimum, that medical personnel had conducted rounds. More than a month after the inspection – and after repeated requests -- LAECI staff sent CFIS the DRC 6011, which had been initialed by medical personnel, suggesting that rounds were conducted on the day that the 4118s were not signed. CFIS informed the warden of the deficient 4118s and will follow up to ensure that medical care is appropriately documented and verified.

The TPU was appropriately staffed with three officers, a sergeant and a lieutenant. CFIS spoke to numerous IPs housed in the unit; no one reported any major issues or concerns.

MISCELLANEOUS INSPECTION MATTERS

Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA)

Congress passed the PREA in 2003 to provide for the analysis of the incidence and effects of prison rape in federal, state and local institutions. PREA also provides information, resources, recommendations and funding to protect incarcerated people from sexual assaults and rapes. PREA applies to all DRC institutions, including privately operated and juvenile correctional facilities.

The Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSP), the law enforcement agency responsible for investigating criminal offenses inside correctional institutions, tracks sexual assaults using the PREA incident system. CFIS reviewed LAECI's PREA reports from that system and found no substantiated cases. PREA signs were appropriately posted throughout the facility (housing units, recreation area, library, visitation area, education area, front entrance and medical services). Contact information for a local rape-crisis center was also posted.

Staff recruiting and retention

LAECI's vacancy rate was greater than 10%. Information regarding hiring events and job openings was posted.

Naloxone (Narcan) going-home kits

LAECI offered Narcan kits to IPs on the day of their release. Each kit contained two doses of naloxone and 10 fentanyl testing strips. The kits are stored in Harm Reduction Vending Machines, which are placed in a discrete area. LORCI was in compliance with DRC 10-SAF-20, Naloxone Safety and Health Procedures.

Administrative Duty Officer (ADO) reports

CFIS reviewed the ADO (50-PAM-02) reports from the week before the inspection, which the LAECI staff provided. An ADO report is completed daily by the designated executive staff tasked with completing inspection rounds. The designated rounds cover food services, the visitation area, a housing unit, the recreation area, and any other area designated by the warden. Upon completion of the rounds, the ADO summarizes the findings and submits the report to the warden's office for review. The report includes the date and time of the rounds, areas visited, observations, concerns and recommendations. The ADO reports reviewed by CFIS were completed on time and in accordance with policy. No violations of 50-PAM-02 were observed or reported.

Security/Facilities

Units were appropriately staffed by two correctional officers, a case manager, a sergeant and a unit manager. Units were clean and organized. Restrooms were clean with all showers, sinks and toilets in good working condition. Units had essential equipment, including a washer and dryer (laundry services), ice machines, water fountains and microwaves. All were in good working order. Fire evacuation plans were posted in highly visible areas. Unit team pictures were posted, as was programming information (staff/incarcerated adult facilitator, date and time of program). CFIS observed appropriate informational memos posted throughout the facility (e.g. PREA, library/law library and recreation hours). Cleaning products and supplies were secured appropriately. Dayrooms had televisions and appropriate recreational games and activities. A review of the DRC 6011 (the sign-in logbook) showed that executive staff members appeared to be conducting rounds according to Policy 50-PAM-02. None of the IPs interviewed raised a concern that would constitute a violation of DRC policy. No safety or security issues were reported or observed.

CONCLUSION

On the day of CFIS's inspection, LAECI was clean. Administrative staff members demonstrated a high level of professionalism and correctional knowledge and were able to answer all questions. LAECI encouraged positive, pro-social behavior for IPs. Programming and vocational services had a strong focus on preparing the incarcerated adults for a successful re-entry into society.

DRC 4118s are vital to verifying the care provided to IPs, and the TPU's 4118s were not signed by medical personnel one day. CFIS opted to verify medical personnel's presence in TPU by asking for the logbook (DRC 6011) for the same day. CFIS had to follow up several times to obtain the logbook from the facility. CFIS will continue to monitor LAECI's 4118s, and it looks forward to a faster response to its requests for documentation.



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