



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Office of the State Inspector General

Michael C. Westfall, CPA
State Inspector General

P.O. Box 1151
Richmond, Virginia 23218

Telephone (804) 625-3255
www.osig.virginia.gov

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The Honorable Abigail Spanberger
Governor of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Governor Spanberger,

The Office of the State Inspector General (OSIG) conducted an unannounced inspection of Sussex I State Prison. This report includes a summary of the factors listed in *Code of Virginia* § 53.1-17.6 (B), recommendations, safety and compliance classification, recommended timeline for the next inspection, and the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) response to the inspection.

Inspection Report: Sussex I State Prison
October 22, 2025, at 08:00 a.m.

Background

Sussex I State Prison is a multi-security level facility in Waverly, VA. The facility houses adult male inmates, including those serving long-term and life sentences. Sussex offers a range of rehabilitative services, including education, vocational, and reentry programming. The facility has an operational capacity of 1,132 male inmates. At the time of inspection, 1,068 male inmates were housed at the facility.

Inspection Scope

The inspection was not intended to assess compliance with legislative or regulatory requirements, nor assess compliance with VADOC policies, though both were considered where relevant. The facility tour was completed with the Assistant Warden, Chief of Housing and Programs, Safety

Specialist, Facility Manager, Operations Manager, and the Warden's Executive Secretary. The Warden was not present for the inspection due to a meeting at another location.

The inspection methodologies employed during the assessment were multifaceted and designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the facility's operations and environment. The inspection team used a variety of methods to gain an understanding of daily life and operations at the facility. These included inquiries and conversations with staff and inmates, as well as extensive on-site observations. Inspectors observed how staff and inmates interacted and paid attention to how procedures were followed throughout the facility.

The inspection included a walkthrough of the facility, observation of operations, and discussions with facility staff and inmates. The areas examined during this inspection included administration, commissary, control room, laundry area, food services, gymnasium, medical unit, housing, restorative housing, visitation, and the satellite port.

Complaint, Grievance and Administrative Remedies Procedures

Inmates have access to the facility's complaint, grievance, and administrative remedies process. Standardized forms for submitting complaints or grievances are available in the control booths of each housing unit. However, in the juvenile housing unit, inmates must request these forms directly from a correctional officer, as they are not readily accessible in the unit. Completed grievance forms can be submitted via secure drop boxes, which are in the foyer of each building. Since the creation of the OSIG Ombudsman Unit, some complaints filed with OSIG have been addressed, while others remain unresolved, pending resolution.

Educational and Rehabilitative Programming

Inmates may participate in Virginia Department of Education and vocational programs, scheduled Monday through Thursday by housing unit. Programming includes a Communication Arts and Design course, which is a self-paced class that typically runs for 12-18 months. This course is designed to teach inmates the principles and techniques of computer-aided design for producing various promotional materials, including brochures, pamphlets, and advertisements. Painting and Drywall is a vocational program designed to teach inmates skills relating to construction, specifically painting, drywall, wallpapering, and other areas that will be useful in performing institutional jobs as well as securing gainful employment when released to the community. The Building Maintenance program is designed to equip inmates with custodial maintenance skills. At the time of the visit, the program was not in operation due to the instructor position being vacant for approximately three to four months.

Food Services

The facility contains two cafeterias: one designated for staff, and the other for inmates. Staff dining contained nine tables. The area beneath the ice machine in the staff dining hall was

observed to be in need of cleaning, and the bug zapper was full of bugs. The inmate meal served on the day of the inspection included chicken parmesan ravioli, carrots, bread, and dessert. Temperature logs for food storage and preparation were reviewed and appeared to be properly maintained.

The kitchen area was found to be organized, with inmate workers actively engaged in bread-making. All inmate workers were observed wearing appropriate safety gear, including hair nets and gloves. However, water was present on the floor in several areas without wet floor signage, which presented a potential safety hazard. Additionally, approximately five hot/cold food warmers were out of service, though each had an active work order for repair. Other maintenance concerns included ceiling tiles that were coming loose, a missing light cover near the milk and produce cooler, and water accumulation outside one of the walk-in coolers. A black mold-like substance was also observed on the ceiling above the sugar room door, which may require further environmental assessment.

In terms of dining arrangements, only two housing pods were utilizing the B side of the inmate dining hall, as the A side was currently inoperable. The B side contains 29 tables, each with four seats, and one table modified to accommodate wheelchair access. A few overhead lights in the dining area were not functioning, but the space remained serviceable for meal distribution.

Gymnasium/Recreation

The facility's gymnasium supports a variety of recreational activities and is equipped with six basketball hoops, providing ample space for both structured and informal play. There was also exercise equipment available around the perimeter of the gym. Common recreational activities include basketball and soccer, which contribute to inmate wellness and morale. While the gym is actively used, it was noted that several overhead lights were not functioning at the time of inspection. Despite this, the space is maintained on a regular schedule, with cleaning and mopping conducted weekly to ensure hygiene and safety.

On the day of the inspection, an emergency response required staff to be temporarily redirected, resulting in insufficient staffing levels to conduct scheduled recreation activities.

Housing

The facility consists of five housing units, one of which is specifically designated for juvenile inmates under the age of 18. This unit is separated from the general population and tailored to meet the developmental and safety needs of younger individuals in custody.

In response to COVID-19 precautions, water fountains in all housing units have been turned off, and water jugs are now provided to ensure inmates have access to drinking water. To support

literacy and engagement, roller carts stocked with books are made available within the housing units, allowing inmates regular access to reading materials.

The facility includes a reentry pod, which offers structured programming to assist inmates in preparing for successful reintegration into the community. As part of this programming, inmates participate in A.M. Development (AMD) and P.M. Development (PMD) meetings – daily group sessions focused on personal growth, accountability, and behavioral development.

In one housing unit, a JPay kiosk has been inoperable for approximately two months. The issue has been reported to the vendor, and the facility is currently awaiting repairs. In the Restrictive Housing Unit (RHU), inmates use roller phones to maintain limited communication access. The RHU is cleaned by a general population inmate, ensuring basic sanitation is maintained.

Medical

The facility's medical unit is staffed by two primary care providers: a Physician Assistant and a Nurse Practitioner. The unit is equipped to deliver a broad range of healthcare services, including general medical care, specialty services, and telemedicine.

Facility Layout and Capabilities:

- Examination Rooms: Three fully equipped exam rooms are available for routine and urgent medical examinations.
- Medical Observation Beds: Six beds are designated for short-term medical observation. At the time of inspection, all six beds were occupied.
- Medical Isolation Cells: Two cells are designated for medical isolation, used for infection control or other clinical needs.
- Pill Room: A secure area is maintained for medication storage and distribution.

Specialty Services Offered:

- Physical Therapy: Available Monday through Thursday.
- Podiatry, Optometry, and Dentistry: Services are provided on-site. Dental care is delivered through Jet Dental, with a part-time dental hygienist supporting the program.
- Mental Health Services: Available to inmates as part of the facility's integrated care approach.
- Telemedicine: The unit is equipped with telemedicine consultations, with services provided through a partnership with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU).

Safety and Security

The facility maintains a comprehensive security infrastructure designed to ensure the safety of staff, inmates, and visitors. Security screening procedures include the use of a visitor log, walk-

through magnetometer, X-ray machine, phone detection unit, and pat-down/frisk searches. These measures are consistently applied to all individuals entering the facility.

The institution is equipped with over 300 surveillance cameras, sensor zones, and multiple perimeter security features, including razor-wire fencing. These systems work in tandem to monitor activity and prevent unauthorized access or movement.

Fire safety protocols are also in place, with fire extinguishers readily accessible throughout the facility. All extinguishers reviewed during the inspection had current monthly inspection tags, indicating compliance with routine safety checks.

Staffing, Recruitment and Training

There are several staffing vacancies at the facility. While there are several officers in phase training, there are still a significant number of vacant positions. The facility reported vacancy impacts heavy transportation schedules, including medical appointments and emergency ER runs, and is currently affecting daily operations, programming, and both in-pod and outside recreations. Hiring events are ongoing at both the facility and the Regional Office.

Visitation/Intake Area

The visitation area was a large, adequately illuminated multi-purpose room. The room featured wall murals created by inmates. The area accommodates both contact and non-contact visitation, allowing inmates to meet with visitors in either format. In-person visitation hours are available at the facility on Saturday or Sunday, and recognized state holidays. In-person visitation for general population inmates is limited to two hours per session. Visitors are required to go back to the front entrance to use the restroom. The visitation area also includes a soundproof room designated for parole board and magistrate hearings. Each visitor to the facility may be on the visitation list of only one inmate - unless approved by the Warden. The visitation area is periodically utilized for inmate intake processing, depending on facility needs.

Additional Information

As reported by facility management:

- **Staffing:** The facility employed 34 security staff and 56 non-security personnel at the time of the inspection, with 163 vacancies. Twenty-five staff members received disciplinary action within the past year. The average tenure of correctional staff was 7.9 years. *VADOC provided the staff-to-inmate ratio at the facility; however, due to security concerns, this information will not be publicly reported.*

- **Lockdowns:** Over the past three years, the facility underwent 20 lockdowns, with the most recent lockdown occurring July 7, 2025 – July 18, 2025. No instances of over-detention among inmates were reported at the facility.
- **Physical/Sexual Assaults/Deaths:** Between November 7, 2024, and November 6, 2025, the facility reported six serious inmate-on-inmate physical assaults and no serious inmate-on-staff assaults. During the same period, there were four reported incidents of sexual assault. Of these, one was determined to be unsubstantiated, while the remaining three are still pending investigation. Additionally, there were five inmate deaths during this timeframe. According to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME), the confirmed causes of death included one due to natural causes, one suicide, and three cases still pending determination.

Over the broader three-year period from November 7, 2022, to November 6, 2025, the facility recorded nineteen serious inmate-on-inmate assaults and three serious inmate-on-staff assaults. There were twelve reports of sexual assault during this period, with three substantiated, two unsubstantiated, two determined to be unfounded, and five still under investigation. A total of eighteen inmate deaths occurred during this three-year span. The OCME confirmed seven deaths due to natural causes, five from drug overdoses, three suicides, and three deaths with causes still pending. There were no work-related staff deaths reported during this period.

- **Visitations:** Within the last year the facility received 16,098 video visit requests. As of November 12, 2025, there have been 11 video visitation denials during calendar year 2025 to date. Denials were due to violations such as disrobing, showering, smoking, operating a vehicle, displaying gang-related gestures, and exhibiting inappropriate images of the visitor during the session.

Key Findings

- Ceiling tiles in the kitchen area exhibited a black mold-like substance. VADOC staff were aware of the issue and stated it is expected to be repaired within the next couple of weeks.
- The kitchen appeared well-organized and clean, including the freezer and cooler area.

Recommendations

Based on observations made during the inspection, OSIG recommends the following:

- Replace non-functioning lights throughout the facility.
- Create and uphold a regular cleaning schedule to ensure the bug zappers and air vents throughout the facility are consistently maintained and cleared of debris.
- Follow-up with vendor to address the outstanding work order on the J-pay kiosk.
- Ensure wet floor signage is used in the kitchen as needed for staff and inmate safety.

- Develop and implement a strategic action plan to address staffing challenges related to recruitment, retention, and vacancies. This plan should ensure adequate staffing levels to support inmate access to essential programs and services, in accordance with ACA Performance Standard 5-ACI-1C-03.
- Develop or incorporate into the Medical Multidisciplinary Quality Improvement Committee a structured review of all in-custody deaths, identifying contributing factors and implementing early intervention strategies to prevent future occurrences. To reduce inmate physical and sexual assaults, proactively assess and manage individual risk through appropriate classification, housing, and supervision, while ensuring staff are properly trained and equipped to maintain a secure and respectful environment.

Inspectors Comments

We extend our sincere appreciation to the leadership team and staff for their cooperation and support throughout the course of this inspection. Our team was especially impressed by the positive rapport observed between staff and inmates. It is evident that the facility fosters a constructive and respectful environment.

Facility Classification

Tier III – The facility has adequate conditions of confinement and programming options requiring a subsequent inspection within 36 months.

Virginia Department of Corrections Response

The Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) appreciates the Office of the State Inspector General's (OSIG) comprehensive and constructive inspection of Sussex I State Prison. We value OSIG's recognition of the facility's efforts to maintain security, sanitation, and rehabilitative programming within a structured environment.

Several recommendations outlined in the report have already been addressed. Work orders for non-operational equipment, including the JPay kiosk in the housing unit have been repaired. Lighting repairs have been prioritized throughout the facility, including the gymnasium and dining areas, to ensure adequate illumination for safety and programming.

To improve sanitation and pest control, Sussex I has reinforced its housekeeping plan and implemented routine inspections of food service areas, housing units, and common spaces. Bug zappers and air vents are now included in scheduled cleaning protocols, and staff are documenting compliance to maintain ACA standards. Wet floor signage is being utilized consistently in kitchen areas to prevent safety hazards.

The facility's medical unit continues to provide comprehensive healthcare services, including telemedicine, specialty care, and mental health support. VADOC is incorporating structured

reviews of in-custody deaths into its monthly department head meetings to identify contributing factors and implement early intervention strategies.

VADOC acknowledges OSIG's recommendations regarding staffing and continues developing strategies to improve recruitment and retention. Hiring events are ongoing, and the department is implementing targeted initiatives to ensure adequate coverage for security, healthcare, and programming needs.

Sussex I remains committed to providing robust educational and vocational programming. Current offerings include Communication Arts and Design and Painting and Drywall, with plans to resume Building Maintenance programming upon filling the instructor vacancy. These programs support inmate rehabilitation and successful reintegration into the community.

We appreciate OSIG's recognition of the professionalism and cooperation demonstrated by staff and inmates during the inspection. VADOC remains committed to continuous improvement and will continue implementing enhancements to uphold the standards reflected in OSIG's Tier III classification.

OSIG's appreciates the assistance provided by the Virginia Department of Corrections during this inspection. Please contact me with any questions at 804-625-3255 or michael.westfall@osig.virginia.gov.

Sincerely,



Michael C. Westfall, CPA
State Inspector General

cc: The Honorable Bonnie Krenz-Schnurman, Chief of Staff to Governor Spanberger
Jay Jones, Attorney General of Virginia (via Chief of Staff Nicky Zamostny)
Travis Hill, Chief Deputy Attorney General of Virginia
Senate Committee on Rehabilitation and Social Services
House Committee on Public Safety
Corrections Oversight Committee
Joseph Walters, Director, Virginia Department of Corrections
Dave Robinson, Chief Deputy Director, Virginia Department of Corrections
Holly Cline, Chief of Staff, Virginia Department of Corrections