



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Office of the State Inspector General

Address: P.O. Box 1151
Richmond, Virginia 23218

Phone: (804) 625-3255
Website: www.osig.virginia.gov

June 23, 2026

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 Wallens Ridge 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: Wallens Ridge State Prison
April 8, 2026, at 08:30 a.m.

Background

Wallens Ridge State Prison is a Level V and Level VI maximum security facility located atop an Appalachian mountain in Big Stone Gap, VA. Opened in April 1999, the 20-acre secure compound spans 135 acres of property and houses adult male inmates serving long sentences. The facility is designed as a comprehensive system aimed at addressing the criminogenic needs of high-risk, high-security individuals, following the principles of evidence-based practices. At the time of inspection, 1,078 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 Emergency Management & Operations

Administrator/Acting Warden, Assistant Warden, and Major who is designated Chief of Security. 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, intake/release area, laundry area, food services, gymnasium, medical unit, housing, educational and vocational programming, warehouse, and visitation.

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.

To complement on-site observations, the inspectors reviewed a range of facility documents. These included a food establishment inspection report, records of completed and pending work orders, data on counselor and educational program enrollments and completions, and current recreation schedules. This documentation offered valuable context and deeper insight into the facility's operations and compliance practices.

Complaint, Grievance, and Administrative Remedies Procedures

Inmates have access to the facility's complaint, grievance, and administrative remedy process. Standardized forms for submitting complaints or grievances are available in the control booths of each housing unit. Inmates request grievance forms from officers and place completed forms in the designated grievance boxes. Grievance mailboxes are mounted in every housing unit, ensuring that forms are readily accessible to all inmates. Since the creation of the OSIG Ombudsman Unit some complaints filed with OSIG have been addressed, while others are pending resolution.

Educational/Rehabilitative and Vocational Programming

The facility offers a range of vocational and educational opportunities, including Virginia Department of Transportation flagging, scissor-lift and forklift training, as well as OSHA-10 and OSHA-30 certifications. Additional programs include custodial maintenance and sanitation, and computer literacy. Future expansion plans include introducing electrical and virtual electronics vocational programs. Available programming also includes the Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning self-study program, and career readiness training, WorkKeys assessment, anger management, Ready-to-Work, Resources for Successful Living, journaling programs, Safety for Change, reentry-focused journals, mental health process groups, ServSafe, and the Money Smart reentry curriculum. Two inmate safety specialists, trained in biohazard protocols, are assigned to the compound, one on each side.

The library is open to inmates four days per week. The library is located within the classroom area and serves inmates who are enrolled in educational programs. Inmates may also request books, which are then delivered directly to their housing units. Requests for law library materials are processed by inmate law library clerks, who fulfill the orders. At the time of the inspection, the librarian position was vacant, and an instructional assistant was providing library services in the interim. The facility was operating under modified operations due to extended lockdowns that began in May 2025. The Virginia Department of Education regional office reopened educational services in March 2026, and religious programming resumed on April 1, 2026.

During the inspection, one of the classroom computers was not functioning. Staff were notified and indicated that a work order would be submitted to address the issue.

Food Services

There are two inmate dining halls; one serving Housing Units A and B, and the other serving Units C and D. A separate dining area is available for staff. Inmates assigned to alternative housing units receive their meals within their units. Meal trays are passed through a wall opening in the dining area, allowing distribution without direct visual contact with inmates. The dining halls include accessible seating areas to ensure compliance with ADA requirements. The lunch meal on the day of inspection consisted of a chicken patty, roll, baked beans, carrots, and graham crackers.

During the inspection, kitchen equipment observed to be out of service included the flat grill and a small mixer. Staff were notified and indicated that a work order would be submitted to address the issue. Additionally, a supervising cook position remained vacant at the time of the inspection. Staff also noted frequent inmate complaints regarding the bulk ground chicken described as “chicken rock” served in the dining hall, referring to a highly processed, mechanically separated chicken product that is compressed or frozen into solid blocks.

Gymnasium/Recreation

The gymnasium serves as a multipurpose recreational facility and offers a full basketball court. The recreational department organizes several building-level tournaments, including chess, push-up and basketball competitions. Overall, the recreation program provides both indoor and outdoor opportunities, available in individual and group formats. Recreation for inmates housed in the Restorative Housing Unit is provided in designated outdoor recreation cages.

Housing

The facility consists of four housing units (A, B, C, and D), each containing six pods with a combination of single- and double-cell occupancy. Inspectors visited the housing units in sections A and D. Each housing unit contains two control rooms that provide full visibility of the inmate living areas. A control room officer is responsible for supervising three pods each, along

with associated dayrooms and outdoor recreation areas. A gun officer is also assigned to each housing unit and oversees three pods with corresponding recreation and dayroom spaces. Housing units include a mix of general population, Shared Allied Management (SAM) participants, and individuals assigned to the Restorative Housing Unit (RHU).

Unit D functions as the RHU with pods assigned for general detention, restorative housing, and step-down statuses. Inmates assigned to this unit undergo a comprehensive classification and reclassification process conducted by a Multi-Disciplinary Team, which includes the Chief of Housing and Programs, a Mental Health Clinician, and a counselor. RHU Step-Down 1 and RHU Step-Down 2 function as general population housing assignments that offer increased privileges compared to restorative housing, while still maintaining a higher level of control than the standard general population unit.

Housing pod A3 houses 22 inmates in single-cell occupancy and is currently operating in Phase 1 of the SAM program. This housing unit is designed to support the coordinated management, treatment, and placement of mentally and medically vulnerable inmates within a Security Level V environment. Housing pod A1 is a general population unit with 44 double occupancy beds.

During the inspection, showers in Housing Unit A1 were observed to need cleaning. The showers also require replacement with stainless steel fixtures to improve sanitation and facilitate easier maintenance.

Medical

The facility delivers both routine and emergency medical care, including medical and nursing services, dental care, and mental health services. The staff consists of a nurse manager, nursing supervisor, registered nurses, and licensed practical nurses. Nursing coverage is provided 24 hours a day. A nurse practitioner is on site every Monday to Friday, and a physician is contracted four days a week. The facility provides a broad range of medical services, including x-ray, ultrasound, physical therapy, orthotics, optometry, sleep studies, and heart-monitor evaluations. The medical unit is equipped with 11 medical beds, two mental health cells, and two isolation rooms. The isolation rooms can be set to zero pressure, meaning air won't flow out of them, which helps prevent germs from spreading.

Medications are delivered to restorative housing units. Scheduled sick calls are Monday through Friday, while emergency care is provided as needed. Medical staff conduct triage clinics twice a month in the gymnasium to provide treatment and reduce backlog.

Dental services are provided by a state dentist two days per week, supported by a dental hygienist and dental assistant. Available dental procedures include cleanings, fillings, and extractions. Staff reported a significant backlog, treating approximately four inmates per day,

with the current dental waitlist extending one to two years. Staff in the dental unit reported having a dedicated officer assigned to the dental area would be beneficial, as the current security officer is responsible for providing security to the entire medical unit. Staff also indicated that obtaining a portable compressor and mobile equipment to support clinic operations would be beneficial. Overall, staff emphasized the need for additional resources to support dental services. A contract optometrist is also available to meet the eye-care needs of the population.

Staffing/Recruitment

The facility participates in a “roving” program that allows correctional officers to temporarily work at other VADOC facilities to help address staffing shortages and improve operational flexibility across the system. During the inspection, twelve officers, seven of whom were supervisors, were assigned to other facilities. Program participants may receive incentives, such as a salary differential for committing to a six-month contract. However, this practice creates staffing challenges for the facility and will need to be reconsidered to alleviate the strain it places on current staffing. At the time of the inspection, the facility had 32 vacancies across multiple departments, including medical, program services, food services, and security.

Safety and Security

The facility had several security measures in place, including a visitor log, body scanners, walk-through magnetometer, X-ray machine, and pat-down/frisk searches to screen staff, inmates, and visitors. A review of the most recent camera inspection report found that three cameras were experiencing connection issues. Ten cameras had obstructions that prevented visibility inside the cells, and two cameras displayed severe haze that made the footage unrecognizable. Maintenance staff was notified of all deficiencies.

The facility is secured by a double-layered perimeter fence topped with razor wire and monitored by patrol vehicles. The outer fence is an Intrudalert 5500 shaker system equipped with motion sensors. Two perimeter security towers and a canine kennel support the outer perimeter. Towers I and II are staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and are equipped with a 12-gauge shotgun and an AR-15 rifle. Several cameras include pan-and-tilt capabilities. Mobile patrol operates around the clock. Staff respond to alerts in both the inner and outer zones.

Sanitation

Each housing unit assigns an inmate worker responsible for daily sweeping and mopping of common areas using detergent or an approved germicidal agent. Despite the established procedures, several sanitation concerns were observed during the inspection. Showers in Housing Unit A1 were observed to require cleaning. Additionally, one of the mental health cells required cleaning and lacked an installed bed, necessitating corrective action. Inspectors also noted the presence of trash on the floor in the visitation area, indicating insufficient upkeep of shared spaces.

The laundry area is equipped with three commercial-grade washing machines and nine dryers. At the time of the inspection, inmate workers were actively engaged in laundry duties, and one washing machine was noted to be out of service. Staff were notified and indicated a work order has been placed. Laundry operations include the cleaning of inmate clothing and bedding, as well as institutional items such as mop heads and kitchen cleaning towels.

Intake/Visitation

The visitation area is a large multipurpose room that is also used periodically for staff meetings. The room is arranged with a long metal table, divided so that one side is designated for visitors and the opposite side for inmates. Inmates may receive up to four visitors per visit. Visitors are screened at the main entrance and receive a hand stamp upon entry. Inmates are searched both before and after visitation.

Inmates are permitted contact visitation on Saturdays, Sundays, and state holidays. Visits are scheduled for groups of ten inmates at a time, with each visit lasting up to four hours. An attorney visitation room is available and is sound-proof to ensure confidentiality. A designated non-contact visitation area is also available as needed. At the time of the inspection, two telephones used for non-contact visits were found to be inoperable, and the area was also being used for storage. Inspectors noted trash on the floor in the visitation area. This information was reviewed with staff during the inspection debrief, and staff indicated that the matters would be addressed.

The inmate intake area is a designated space equipped with one Body Orifice Security Scanner II chair and a full-body metal detector. Inmates undergo a strip search, are issued clothing, and receive medical screening upon intake. During the inspection, the light above the cellphone detector was found to be inoperable; staff were immediately notified and repaired the equipment prior to the inspectors' departure.

Warehouse/Commissary

The warehouse is located outside the main facility perimeter and houses the maintenance unit along with storage and supply operations. Commissary items are delivered to the warehouse by the contracted vendor, Keefe, on Wednesdays. These deliveries are scanned, processed, and then distributed to the housing units on scheduled delivery days.

Additional Information

As validated by the Department's Research Unit on May 12, 2026:

- **Staffing:** The facility employed 334 security staff and 105 non-security personnel at the time of the inspection, with 32 vacancies. Eleven staff members received disciplinary action within the past year. The average tenure of correctional staff was 6.9 years.

VADOC provided the staff-to-inmate ratio at the facility; however, due to security concerns, this information will not be publicly reported.

- **Lockdowns:** Between April 8, 2025, and April 7, 2026, there were a total of 39 lockdowns. Over the past three years, the facility underwent 56 lockdowns, with the most recent lockdown occurring April 26, 2026, which was an unscheduled partial lockdown. No instances of over-detention among inmates were reported at the facility.
- **Physical/Sexual Assaults/Deaths:** During the period from April 8, 2023, to April 7, 2026, there were 19 serious assaults on inmates and 13 serious assaults on staff. From April 8, 2025, to April 7, 2026, there were eight serious assaults on staff and five serious assaults on inmates. Between April 8, 2025, and April 7, 2026, three allegations of sexual abuse were investigated. Two were determined to be unfounded, and one was classified as unsubstantiated. Between April 8, 2023, and April 7, 2026, five allegations of sexual abuse were investigated. Of those, two were unfounded, two were unsubstantiated, and one was substantiated. Between April 8, 2023, and April 7, 2026, there were three inmate deaths. Of those, one was ruled suicide by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME), one was due to natural causes, and one has not yet received a determination from the OCME. Between April 8, 2023, and April 7, 2026, there were no staff deaths.
- **Visitations:** The facility received 12,698 video visitation requests between April 8, 2025, and April 7, 2026. A total of 895 video visitation requests were denied. Video visitations were denied when an inmate or visitor violated the video visitation policy. The reasons included:
 - Dress code violations or lying down: **118**
 - Inmate or visitor exiting the visit early: **66**
 - Visitor in a public area or driving: **225**
 - Use of portable electronics/cell phones: **91**
 - Unapproved minors or unauthorized visitors/inmates: **38**
 - Inmates refusing due to yard rec, gym rec, or work: **15**
 - Maintenance working in the pod: **22**
 - Altercations in the pod: **28**
 - Video visits canceled due to serious or quarterly lockdowns: **292**

The facility received 511 in-person visitation requests between April 8, 2025, and April 7, 2026. A total of 9 in-person visitations were denied. Denials occurred when anomalies were detected on the body scan during the search process and/or a canine alert was triggered. In these cases, visitors were still offered the option of a video visitation.

- Anomaly detected on body scan: **7**
- Inmate involved in an assault prior to the visit: **2**

Recommendations

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

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the current “roving” program to determine its impact on staffing levels at the facility. Although the program is intended to support systemwide operational flexibility, the temporary reassignment of 12 staff members, including seven supervisors, combined with 32 existing vacancies across medical, program services, food services, and security, may place considerable strain on facility operations.
- Develop and implement a strategic action plan to address staffing challenges related to recruitment, retention, and vacancies. This plan should ensure adequate correctional and medical staffing levels to support inmate access to essential programs and access to medical services, in accordance with American Correctional Association (ACA) Performance Standard 5-ACI-1C-03 and the National Commission on Correctional Health Care Standards for health services in prisons P-C-07.
- Consider contracting supplemental dental services and/or exploring opportunities for periodic dental service clinics to help improve access and reduce backlog of inmates waiting for dental services.
- Repair all identified maintenance issues (including kitchen equipment, classroom computers, and non-contact phones in visitation) to ensure proper functionality and support safe, efficient operations.
- Ensure that the written cleaning routine is fully implemented throughout the facility and that cleaning activities are continuously supervised to verify that all work is completed properly and thoroughly, in accordance with ACA housekeeping and maintenance standard 5-ACI-5D-05.
- Facility leadership should develop and implement measures to expand access to religious programming and educational services. This should include assessing participant needs, establishing partnerships with qualified faith providers, ensuring equitable availability across faith traditions, and communicating a consistent schedule of services. Regular monitoring should be conducted to verify that services remain accessible and aligned with policy requirements.
- Facility leadership should conduct a formal root-cause analysis to determine the underlying factors contributing to increased lockdowns. This assessment should review staffing levels, incident trends, operational procedures, and environmental conditions. Findings should be used to implement targeted corrective actions aimed at reducing the frequency and duration of lockdown events.

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 II – The facility has violations of rights, substandard conditions of confinement, or substandard program options. A subsequent inspection is required within 12 months due to the maximum-security status.

Virginia Department of Corrections Response

The VADOC appreciates the thorough inspection of Wallens Ridge State Prison and welcomes the opportunity to work with OSIG to identify areas of improvement. All recommendations have been addressed as set forth below:

The facility acknowledges the recommendation to conduct a comprehensive review of the impact of the current roving program on staffing levels. The Virginia Department of Corrections' roving program is a voluntary, statewide initiative that allows certified correctional officers to temporarily assist facilities experiencing staffing shortages for a period of up to six months. The program is designed to promote operational continuity and provide support to institutions with critical staffing needs across the Commonwealth. Facility leadership will continue to monitor staffing patterns, overtime utilization, and operational demands to assess the impact of employee participation in the roving program on institutional operations. While the temporary reassignment of staff may present challenges, the facility remains committed to implementing appropriate staffing strategies to maintain the safety and security of the institution, ensure adequate supervision of the inmate population, and support the continued delivery of essential services.

The facility is actively developing and implementing strategies to improve recruitment and retention efforts to ensure adequate staffing levels to support security, healthcare, and programming operations in accordance with the American Correctional Association (ACA) Performance Standard 5-ACI-1C-03. Wallens Ridge State Prison will continue to participate in recruitment initiatives, including hosting and attending job fairs, engaging with community partners and educational institutions, and promoting employment opportunities through various outreach efforts. Additionally, the facility will continue to support retention initiatives designed to strengthen workforce stability and maintain the safe and effective operation of the institution.

VADOC acknowledges OSIG's recommendation regarding the use of supplemental dental services to improve access to care and reduce the backlog of inmates awaiting dental treatment. Wallens Ridge State Prison has recently hired a full-time dentist to enhance the facility's capacity to provide timely and comprehensive dental services to the inmate population. In addition, the facility will continue to utilize Jet Dental Services to supplement on-site dental operations as needed. The combined use of full-time clinical staffing and contracted dental services will assist in improving access to care, addressing existing treatment needs, and reducing wait times for dental services.

Wallens Ridge State Prison has addressed and resolved all identified maintenance issues, including those involving kitchen equipment, classroom computers, and non-contact telephones located in the visitation area. These repairs have restored proper functionality and support the continued safe, secure, and efficient operation of facility services. The facility will continue to monitor equipment and infrastructure needs and respond promptly to maintenance concerns as they arise.

Wallens Ridge State Prison has reinforced the implementation of the facility's written cleaning routine to ensure compliance with ACA Housekeeping and Maintenance Standard 5-ACI-5D-05. Inmate workers have been assigned specific cleaning responsibilities, and staff provide ongoing supervision to verify that cleaning activities are completed properly, thoroughly, and in accordance with established expectations. Additionally, the facility has implemented a monthly power washing schedule to enhance sanitation efforts and maintain a clean, safe, and orderly environment throughout the institution.

The facility leadership has taken steps to expand access to both religious programming and educational services. In May 2026, the facility resumed in-person religious programming to provide inmates with increased opportunities to participate in faith-based activities and services. The facility will continue to assess participation needs, communicate available programming schedules, and monitor the delivery of religious services to ensure accessibility and alignment with applicable policies and procedures. Additionally, educational programming has been expanded from three instructional periods to four instructional periods, increasing opportunities for inmate participation and access to educational services. Facility leadership will continue to monitor both religious and educational programming to evaluate effectiveness, address identified needs and ensure that services remain accessible to the inmate population.

Leadership will continue to evaluate the factors contributing to lockdown events through the ongoing review of incident reports, staffing levels, and operational practices. All significant incidents are reviewed by facility leadership to identify trends, determine underlying causes, and assess opportunities for implementing measures designed to prevent similar occurrences in the future. Additionally, staffing levels are routinely monitored to ensure the facility maintains adequate coverage to support safe and efficient operations. Information obtained through these reviews will be utilized to implement targeted corrective actions, when appropriate, with the goal of reducing the frequency and duration of lockdown events while maintaining the safety and security of the institution.

The VADOC appreciates OSIG's recognition of the professionalism, cooperation, and support provided by staff throughout the inspection process. VADOC remains committed to continuous

improvement and will continue to implement enhancements that support safe, secure, and effective operations while upholding the standards reflected in OSIG's Tier II 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 corrine.louden@osig.virginia.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Corrine A. Loudon".

Corrine A. Loudon
Chief Deputy 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
 Jeremiah Fitz, Chief Deputy Director, Virginia Department of Corrections