



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Office of the State Inspector General

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The Honorable Glenn Youngkin
Governor of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
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Dear Governor Youngkin,

The Office of the State Inspector General (OSIG) conducted an unannounced inspection of Wise Correctional Unit #18. 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: Wise Correctional Unit #18
May 12, 2025, at 8:33 a.m.

Background

Wise Correctional Unit #18 is a minimum-security level correctional facility located in Coeburn, Virginia. The facility encompasses two distinct housing units and has the capacity to house up to 100 general population inmates. The institution occupies a 38-acre site, which includes an extensive agricultural operation. This land supports approximately 4,000 apple trees and 15 cultivated garden plots producing a variety of fresh produce such as corn, tomatoes, cabbage, kale, assorted greens, beans, turnips, squash, and zucchini.

In addition to traditional farming, Wise Correctional Unit #18 features five hydroponic greenhouses that enable year-round vegetable cultivation regardless of external weather conditions. The facility also operates a unique tilapia greenhouse, where fish are hatched and raised by inmate farm crews through an aquaponic system, which integrates fish farming with plant cultivation for efficient resource use. This arrangement maintains a water recycling system

that cleans and redistributes water from fish tanks to crops. Inmate crews operate all greenhouse operations year-round. The agricultural products harvested on-site are utilized to supply not only this facility, but also surrounding correctional facilities, significantly reducing food procurement costs and enhancing sustainability.

Educationally, inmates at this facility are offered the opportunity to pursue General Educational Development (GED) certificates while incarcerated. Furthermore, the facility provides a variety of developmental and rehabilitative courses aimed at supporting inmate growth, skill development, and successful community reintegration upon release.

Inspection Scope

This 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 inspection team conducted the review in collaboration with the facility's Superintendent and Lieutenant, while the inspection process involved comprehensive discussions with staff, management, and inmates, alongside direct observation of the facility's physical environment and its daily operations. The areas examined during the inspection included both housing units designated as A and B, the inmate dining hall, staff dining area, recreation spaces, intake and visitation areas, library and law library, weight room, educational classroom, barbershop area, bathroom/shower area, laundry facilities, administrative offices, medical and dental departments, commissary, greenhouses, outdoor warehouse spaces, and the secured outer perimeter of the compound.

Safety and Security

The facility maintained multiple layers of security designed to ensure the safety of staff, inmates, and visitors. Security measures included a visitation log, walk-through magnetometers, cellphone detection devices, and pat-down searches administered to all staff, inmates, and visitors entering the facility. Visitors were issued identification badges upon entry to facilitate tracking and accountability.

The facility was equipped with a network of 30 surveillance cameras, all of which were fully operational at the time of inspection. The perimeter was secured by a fencing system topped with razor wire, creating a secure barrier to prevent unauthorized entry or escape. The observed extinguishers throughout the facility were current with notated maintenance schedules.

Housing

The facility did not have a Restorative Housing Unit, a fact supported by staff reports indicating no recent incidents requiring such measures. If the need for removal of an inmate due to behavioral issues arises, the inmate is immediately transferred to another facility. The facility consisted of housing units designated A and B, positioned at opposite ends of the building. Between these units, a centralized officer post provided a vantage point for continuous

observation of both sides. Both housing units were identical in design and featured an open dormitory-style layout. Each unit contained bed space for 50 inmates, providing a combined capacity of 100 inmates. On the day of inspection, the inmate population was 75, and many inmates were assigned to off-site work programs either in the local community or at other correctional facilities. Notably, several inmates from Wise Correctional Unit #18 were temporarily transferred to Red Onion State Prison to provide support during its lockdown period, assisting with food services, janitorial duties, and other tasks needed during times of restricted movement.

Neither housing unit was equipped with centralized air conditioning. Instead, multiple industrial fans were placed in main areas and windows to regulate temperature, which was recorded at approximately 70 degrees Fahrenheit during the inspection. Inspectors observed that fans installed in the window units were heavily coated with dirt, dust, and debris, a concern promptly communicated to the Superintendent. Additionally, each housing unit had a backup natural gas heater that could be utilized during colder weather. The housing units were generally well-maintained and clean, with inmates adhering to established bunk compliance rules, which required beds to be made, and chairs placed on top of the beds when inmates are not present. Each bunk was outfitted with a mattress and cover, pillow, blankets, and inmates' personal belongings. Common areas within each unit included two functioning telephones, three stationary tables (each with four chairs), one television with two benches in front, two toilets, one urinal, and two sinks. Lighting was adequate throughout both units, with all fixtures fully functional at the time of the inspection.

A central common area between the units, where the officers were stationed, contained one JPay kiosk and one video visitation station accessible to inmates from both sides. Additionally, a message board in this area displayed important information such as the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) notices, staff memos, religious programming schedules, and American Correctional Association (ACA) information. Inmates had access to the basement, which contained shower facilities, programming rooms, and other services, including library and law library, educational classroom, weight area, and barbershop area.

Complaint, Grievance, and Administrative Forms

Written complaint forms, regular grievance forms, and emergency grievance forms were readily available at the officer post located between the two housing units. Reportedly, inmates shared overall contentment and confidence in staff efforts to resolve issues verbally for a quick resolution and before a written complaint submission. Other forms accessible to inmates included trust fund withdrawal requests, job applications, commissary menus, special order forms, and medical request forms. Since the creation of the Office of the State Inspector General (OSIG) Ombudsman Unit, no complaints have been filed regarding this facility.

Basement Facilities: Programs and Services

Access to the basement was provided via a stairwell from the main level, passing through a secured door labeled “Basement.” This basement contained a range of essential inmate services, to include the commissary office, medical department, an officer post, multiple restroom facilities (eight toilets, nine showers, and eight sinks), a barbershop area, an educational classroom, chaplain’s office, and a library with an adjoining law library space, laundry facility, and weight training area. Laundry facilities included two washers and dryers located near the kitchen and an additional washer and dryer in the basement. Inmates were permitted to have their personal and state-issued clothing laundered twice weekly. Seasonal blankets are exchanged quarterly, and kitchen uniforms are laundered on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The basement featured three wall-mounted telephones and one JPay kiosk, all in working condition. The weight training area included a variety of barbells and weighted equipment accessible to inmates except during lockdown periods. The showers were clean and maintained with consistent water pressure and hot water temperatures. Toilets generally had good water pressure; however, inspectors noted that flushing multiple toilets simultaneously occasionally resulted in incomplete flushes.

The educational classroom located in the basement was observed to be in use during the inspection with a GED class in session. The instructor reported that 10 inmates had earned their GEDs in the past year. The basement library was closed during the visit due to the librarian absence. The facility offered a diverse array of programs, including Recovery Route, Decision Points, Re-entry Journaling, Road to Success, Inside/Out Dads, welding courses, and general education. The facility will be implementing a Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) program, providing inmates with a chance to receive a Class B CDL.

The facility’s warehouse included a large, refrigerated storage space holding emergency water supplies for the facility and neighboring state facilities. Staff reported recent transfers of emergency water to other state correctional facilities experiencing shortages. Gardening and automotive tools were stored securely in the warehouse, organized on shadow boards that track tool usage and sign-outs via log sheets. Inmates have the chance to enroll in the facility’s welding program and obtain a certification. The Superintendent reported that, since she assumed her position, there have been no accidents related to the welding program.

Sanitation and Cleanliness

The facility was observed to be clean and free of clutter. Designated inmate unit workers regularly performed cleaning duties, including sweeping and mopping floors. Trash disposal practices were sanitary, and inspectors found no evidence of pests or rodents. Communal toilets and shower areas were properly sanitized, as was the barbershop adjacent to the shower stalls. Inspectors noted one loose saloon door leading into the shower area, which swung freely when

opened. This was immediately reported to staff for repair. Between 8:00 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. each day, all inmates from housing units A and B descended to the basement to allow unit workers to thoroughly clean and sanitize the housing units without disruption.

Medical Services

The medical department was comprised of one medical authority and four nursing staff. Medical services were not available 24 hours a day; nurses worked rotating shifts between 6:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Inmates may access dental and medical services located at Red Onion State Prison, facilitating timely care due to the close proximity of the two institutions. For urgent medical needs, inmates are transported off-site to emergency care providers. The facility's doctor visits on Tuesdays, and an optometrist makes monthly visits. The facility was scheduled to hold a mass dental clinic in the visitation area in July. The medical area included one examination room and a small on-site pharmacy. A review of the sick call list revealed minimal inmate requests for medical attention during the previous week, indicating low demand for effective ongoing care.

Food Services

Meals are served in the inmate chow hall three times daily, although attendance is not mandatory. The chow hall contained 11 tables, each seating four inmates. There were no wheelchair-accessible tables due to the facility's multiple steps and lack of housing wheelchair inmates. Inmates requiring wheelchairs would not be assigned to this facility or would be transferred out due to insufficient accessibility infrastructure. The serving line included a tray station, a drink dispenser, and an ice machine. On the day of inspection, the lunch menu consisted of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, cucumber slices, and granola bars. Since many inmates work off-site, only one hot meal is served daily.

The kitchen preparation area was generally clean with minimal water observed on the floor. Inspectors noticed stained aprons hanging in the kitchen, which kitchen staff promptly removed once brought to their attention. A broken freezer, which was no longer in use, had been replaced with a newer model, but had not been removed from the facility. Daily kitchen utensil counts were accomplished by a documented report signed by inmates. Coolers were used to transport meals to off-site inmate workers. Inspectors noted a crate of milk in the refrigerator with an expiration date of April 11, 2025, which was reported to staff during the debrief. The Warden advised the milk would be discarded on the day of the inspection. All kitchen workers were observed wearing gloves and hair coverings in accordance with hygiene standards.

Several light fixtures in the kitchen had broken or missing covers. Although the Superintendent reported attempts to have these replaced, replacements were denied because the bulbs were shatterproof. The facility did not utilize insulated carts for meal trays since meal service occurred exclusively in the chow hall rather than housing units. Inmates returning from off-site work were provided with trays upon return.

Staff Dining

The staff dining area was located adjacent to the inmate chow hall and included two tables with six chairs each and a television. A refrigerator and ice machine were also available. The area was clean and orderly during the inspection, although no staff were present at the time.

Inmate Work Crews

The facility participated in two Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) inmate work crews supervised by an armed officer and a certified VDOT road foreman. These crews perform roadside clearing and, more recently, emergency tree removal and debris cleanup following Hurricane Helene in September 2024. Their work supported communities including the towns of Independence and Damascus, Grayson County, and the High Knob area of Wise County. The positive impact this work had on the community was documented in a booklet created by the Major and displayed for visitors and staff to view.

Visitation Room and Intake Area

The visitation room was located in a separate building adjacent to the housing unit, inside the secure perimeter. Visitors enter through a back entrance, passing through a metal detector, scanning machine, and cellphone detector before being admitted. A staffed officer post monitors visitation activity. The room was spacious, clean, and included stacked chairs along the walls, a non-functional vending machine, and a children's area equipped with board games and crafts to entertain visiting children.

The intake area where incoming inmates are processed was located next to the visitation building. Under staff supervision, inmates line up for search procedures conducted inside the building to prevent contraband introduction. Once processed, inmates enter the facility through a secured side entrance.

Administrative Building

Situated uphill from the housing unit, the administrative building housed offices for inmate classification, the hearings officer, grievances coordinator, Superintendent, and support staff. Originally the Superintendent's residence, the building had been repurposed into functional office space.

Additional Information

As reported by facility management:

- **Staffing:** The facility employed 31 security staff and 23 non-security personnel at the time of the inspection, with one vacancy for a Major position and one vacancy in Building and Grounds. No disciplinary actions were recorded for staff over the past year. The average tenure of correctional staff was 12 years.

- **Lockdowns:** The facility experienced seven lockdowns over the past three years, including two in the last year. The most recent scheduled lockdown occurred on April 30, 2025. The most recent unscheduled lockdown occurred on March 14, 2023.
- **Physical/Sexual Assaults/Deaths:** The facility reported no serious physical assaults, sexual assaults, or staff deaths over the past three years. They did report one inmate death from natural causes over the past three years, however there were no inmate deaths in the last year.
- **Visitations:** From May 1, 2024 until May 1, 2025, the facility received 208 requests for in-person visits, with none being denied. Additionally, 1,727 video visit requests were received and there were 130 video visitation denials/cancellations.

Recommendations

Based on observations made during this inspection, OSIG recommends that the facility:

- Repair or replace the loose saloon door leading to the shower areas to improve safety and reduce the risk of slips, trips, and falls.
- Develop a recurring schedule for cleaning, maintaining, and inspecting the fans currently used in the housing units.
- Explore the feasibility of installing centralized air conditioning throughout the housing units to reduce the number of fans that accumulate dust and debris and occupy space within the housing units.
- Replace broken light fixtures and missing light covers in the kitchen to maintain safety standards.

Inspectors Comments

We would like to express our appreciation to the leadership team and staff for their cooperation and support during this inspection. Our team was particularly impressed by the relationship between staff and inmates. It is apparent that there is a positive environment within the facility.

Facility Classification

Tier III – This facility had adequate conditions of confinement and programming options requiring an inspection within the next 36 months.

Department of Corrections Response

The Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) appreciates the Office of the State Inspector General's (OSIG) thorough and constructive inspection of Wise Correctional Unit #18. We are pleased these findings reflect our ongoing commitment to secure, humane, and efficient correctional practices.

VADOC has addressed several of the recommendations outlined in the inspection. The loose saloon door leading to the shower area has been repaired, and a routine maintenance schedule for industrial fans in the housing units has been implemented to prevent the buildup of dust and debris. In response to concerns about climate control, we are actively assessing the feasibility of installing centralized air conditioning in the housing areas, balancing inmate comfort with operational efficiency and cost considerations.

In the kitchen area, while the broken light fixture covers involved shatterproof bulbs, VADOC is pursuing replacement options to meet safety expectations. The expired milk identified during inspection was immediately discarded, and enhanced monitoring procedures have been added to prevent similar oversights in the future.

Since the inspection, Wise Correctional Unit #18 has successfully launched its Commercial Driver's License (CDL) program, with the first group of inmates currently enrolled. The facility continues to expand its vocational offerings and contribute meaningfully to surrounding communities through its VDOT work crews.

We are proud of the progress made at Wise Correctional Unit #18 and remain committed to implementing improvements where needed while maintaining the high standards reflected in OSIG's Tier III classification.

OSIG appreciates the assistance provided by the 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 John Littel, Chief of Staff to Governor Youngkin
Justin Vélez-Hagan, Deputy Chief of Staff to Governor Youngkin
Kate Stockhausen, Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff
Jason Miyares, Attorney General of Virginia
Senate Committee on Rehabilitation and Social Services
House Committee on Public Safety
Corrections Oversight Committee
Chadwick Dotson, Director, Virginia Department of Corrections
Dave Robinson, Chief Deputy Director, Virginia Department of Corrections
Holly Cline, Chief of Staff, Virginia Department of Corrections