

Family Advisory Board Meeting Q&A Follow Up

May and September 2025 Meetings

Visting Experience

Question/Concern: Some facilities require visitors to sit across from their loved ones, while others allow them to sit next to their loved ones to hold hands. Why is this not consistent across facilities?

Answer: It is the responsibility of the facility to assign seating in the visiting room. While this can often be accomplished in a way that allows visitors to sit next to their loved one to allow for approved physical contact, such as hand holding, monitoring and security requirements may prevent that in some situations.

Question/Concern: While the MDOC indicated there would be a single price for visiting room photos, families continue to report different prices are being charged at a small number of facilities.

Answer: After the May meeting, the MDOC worked with the facilities to confirm that they were all charging the approved price for two prints of the visiting room photo. It was determined that some facilities were not yet utilizing the established price, which has been resolved.

Question/Concern: Some facilities sell photo tickets in the lobby, allowing them to be purchased outside of the \$30 maximum on vending cards, while other facilities place them in the visiting room so they must be purchased from the \$30 on the vending card.

Answer: After the September meeting, the MDOC surveyed facilities to gain a better understanding of where visiting photo tickets are sold and why. Based on that survey we determined that there were justifiable reasons that some facilities placed photo tickets in the visiting room, while others placed them in lobby machines. Facilities will continue to have flexibility to place the tickets in the most logical location, but the dollar

amount limit on vending cards will be increased to \$35 in the near future to reflect that photo tickets may need to be purchased in certain visiting rooms.

Question/Concern: Some facilities limit the number of photo tickets that can be purchased for a single visit. What is the MDOC's policy on purchasing photo tickets?

Answer: MDOC in-person visiting standards allow for a visitor to take "a photograph" during the visit, meaning a single photograph during each visit (with one print for the incarcerated individual and one print for the visitor).

Question/Concern: Can individual hug, kiss, and/or embrace during a visiting room photo?

Answer: MDOC in-person visiting standards allow for an embrace and kiss while the photo is being taken.

Question/Concern: Why was the second visiting room at STF closed for visiting? This is a large facility, but it offers only 20 potential visiting spots for each visiting block.

Answer: The second visiting room at the Central Michigan Correctional Facility was previously converted into core programming space to help facilitate programming prior to parole consideration. The remaining visiting room at Central Michigan is larger than most other visiting rooms to allow for additional simultaneous visits due to the size of the facility.

Question/Concern: Several facilities continue to consistently start visits after the posted visiting time, reducing the time that loved ones can spend visiting.

Answer: The Department is continuing to stress the importance of starting visits at the listed times. Specific concerns about visits not starting on time should be directed to MDOC-Visiting@Michigan.gov so concerns can be tracked and addressed.

Question/Concern: Who is responsible at each facility to ensure the visiting room has appropriate supplies, activities, and everything is in working condition? This includes a lack of toys/activities for young visitors at many facilities and visiting room tablets no longer working.

Answer: The Corrections Officer assigned to supervise the visiting room is responsible for ensuring the room is clean, adequate supplies are in place, and the room is ready to support visits. The MDOC is currently working with the state's technology department (DTMB) to explore replacements for the visiting room tables that no longer work.

This was a renewed focus for all facilities after the September meeting, with all facilities receiving directions to review visiting room items and make necessary purchases to replace incomplete, damaged, or unusable items.

Question/Concern: The MDOC needs to review visiting policies and practices from the perspective of creating an opportunity that is welcoming/supportive of families.

Answer: The Department understands the continuing feedback from families that the visiting experience is not fully supportive of families. Changes have been made based on this feedback, such as moving to longer weekday visits, more back-to-back visits at several sites, feedback email addresses for facilities, an online visiting application, changing the time that visits can start to be booked, and increased focus at the facility level on timely visitor processing. The MDOC continues to work to incorporate more feedback into the visiting process, while recognizing that MDOC operations are complex and not all recommendations can be adopted.

After the September meeting, the MDOC reviewed the amount of visiting facilities offer as compared to prior to 2020. Several facilities adjusted their schedules or the number of simultaneous visiting slots to increase visiting options, while other schedules remain under review based on utilization.

Question/Concern: The visiting standards do not allow visitors who are participating in back-to-back visits to go to their locker or vehicle. How will female visitors access feminine hygiene products?

Answer: The MDOC will begin providing feminine hygiene products at no cost in public restrooms. Orders are being placed to have these supplies on hand at all facilities in the future.

Question/Concern: The visiting standards cause confusion about how back-to-back visits should be counted as they say they cannot exceed six hours (weekday) or four hours (weekend).

Answer: The MDOC agrees the standards need to be updated to provide clarity that back-to-back visits will be honored as scheduled and any time between the visits in the visiting room will not be counted as part of the maximum visiting time (e.g. two, three-hour visits with 30 minutes in-between would result in six and a half hours of total visiting).

Question/Concern: As the MDOC begins utilizing item scanners at the gates, will the Department be adjusting the visiting process to ensure that visitors do not lose time with their loved ones?

Answer: The Department is actively monitoring the gate processes at the facilities that are piloting this technology. Any changes to recommended visitor arrival times will be communicated to the public. Some facilities have already begun making necessary adjustments to visiting times and processes as a result.

Question/Concern: The temporary “booties” provided at sites that are using item scanners are potentially slippery, potentially if the floor is wet.

Answer: The MDOC appreciates this feedback and is working with facilities on strategies to keep everyone safe as they go through the gate search process.

Question/Concern: The cleanliness of certain visiting rooms was raised as a persistent concern at some sites.

Answer: This feedback was communicated directly to facilities, who have been reminded that all visiting rooms must be clean with items in working order.

Visiting Scheduling

Question/Concern: Why do facilities have differing amounts of time between visiting blocks? This time reduces the potential time for visiting and is not consistent across facilities.

Answer: Facility operations differ between prisons, including the movement of individuals within the facilities, non-visiting activities, and other factors that impact individual visiting schedules. The Department is working with individual facilities to create more consistency in the visiting experience, including how visits are scheduled, but the amount of time between visits will be subject to factors that are specific to each facility.

Question/Concern: The change to three-hour visiting blocks for weekday visiting has resulted in some facilities having only single weekday visits, rather than the two that were previously available. This has resulted in a net loss in weekday visiting at these sites (from 4 hours to 3 hours)?

Answer: The MDOC increased weekday visiting lengths with the goal of promoting weekday visits, which have been underutilized over the past few years. The new time length of these visits required new schedules to be developed and at some facilities, this eliminated the opportunity for back-to-back visits on certain days. We continue to work with facilities to establish visiting schedules that work with their unique operations, but in some instances, this may result in the reduction of total visiting times on certain weekdays.

Question/Concern: The online visiting scheduler currently requires people to be online at midnight to maximize the likelihood of scheduling a visit. Can this time be moved to be fairer to more families who are trying to secure a visit?

Answer: Based on feedback from FAB meetings, the scheduler was updated to open scheduling at 8am each day, rather than midnight. This will reduce the need for individuals to stay up late to schedule visits and should allow for a fairer visiting process for families.

Question/Concern: The total number of visiting hours at most prisons is still significantly lower than it was in 2019. What is being done to return the number of visiting hours to past levels?

Answer: Facilities continue to review their visiting schedules as compared to 2019. Some facilities have similar hours of visiting available as compared to the earlier period, while others have reduced total visiting hours. The Department is reviewing these schedules but continues to find that many weekday visiting options remain underutilized as compared to 2019 at many sites. The MDOC is working to obtain additional feedback to better understand why these visits see less utilization, including at sites with back-to-back weekday visiting options that could result in 6+ hours of visiting.

Question/Concern: Can the MDOC review the average visiting group size and establish the total number of visiting groups based on that figure and occupancy, rather than basing it on every group being the maximum size? Many facilities may have space for more visits to occur using that approach.

Answer: The Department has collected data related to average visiting group sizes and visiting spaces. Several facilities have now increased the number of simultaneous visiting groups based on this information and we continue to review space utilization with other sites.

Question/Concern: Could GTL offer a waitlist/standby option for visits so that if individuals cancel their visit within 48 hours of it happening, someone else could be offered that visiting time?

Answer: The MDOC has discussed this concept with the current scheduling contractor and it is not a feature they are currently able to offer. This is a feature that the MDOC will be discussing further with other contractors as part of any future contract.

Vending

Question/Concern: Will the vending company provide any healthy options in the visiting room?

Answer: The MDOC has spoken with the vending contractor and they are willing to add a variety of healthier items. They will be monitoring purchasing trends for these items and will remove those that do not sell from the regular inventory but will work to expand the available selection.

Question/Concern: At previous meetings concerns about vending machines often being empty were raised and the MDOC indicated it was working with the vendor to address. Many sites still have empty vending machines when visits start, so what is being done to address this issue?

Answer: The MDOC has worked with the vending contractors to increase their service levels around high demand visiting days, particularly the weekends. The MDOC continues to monitor and specific concerns can be sent to MDOC-Visiting@Michigan.gov so that the department can track vendor performance from the customer perspective.

Question/Concern: Some facilities are still utilizing quarters for vending machines, while the policy only discusses the use of vending cards. When will these sites be updated?

Answer: All visiting room vending machines should now be converted to the debit card system except for the Lakeland Correctional Facility. Vending machines in the lobbies continue to be coin operated, as they are also accessible to staff and contractors who do not always utilize the debit card system.

Question/Concern: It has been reported that some visiting rooms charge more for the same item as compared to other vending machines in the facilities selling similar items.

Answer: The MDOC has reviewed this concern but has not been able to identify where the same items is for sale for two different prices within an MDOC facility. We believe pricing between the lobby/staff areas/visiting room is consistent and all fall under the contract requirements for item pricing.

Video Visits

Question/Concern: Individuals often must call the facility to be checked into video visits and securing a refund for a missed or incomplete video visit is challenging. Can this process be reviewed again with staff to ensure that video visits are started promptly?

Answer: A reminder has been sent to staff about the necessity of these video visits being connected promptly. A few thousand video visits are successfully completed each week within the MDOC, so specific concerns should be sent to MDOC-Visiting@Michigan.gov so they can be reviewed and issues resolved with the appropriate facility.

Question/Concern: Can video visits be reinstated by MDOC staff rather than requiring the user to seek a refund and reset of the quota with the contractor? This process is time consuming for calls that do not connect through no fault of the video caller.

Answer: Video visits are a contracted service, so requests for refunds must be initiated with the contractor. The MDOC has discussed concerns about customer service with the contractor, who should be contacted at (855) 466-2832, which is the ViaPath Michigan Customer Service number.

Question/Concern: Can a listing of video visit slots be added to the MDOC's website similar to the in-person visiting schedules?

Answer: The MDOC has spoken with the video visiting company and it is not possible to efficiently create a listing of all available video visiting times around the state. The Department is exploring if there are other ways to provide a summary of video visit availability, but the most up-to-date information will always be available within the visit scheduling website, which will show currently available video visiting spots for the upcoming week (until booked by others).

Miscellaneous

Question/Concern: The State budget called for a reduction in fees charged to incarcerated individuals and their families. What fees have changed or been reduced?

Answer: The state budget called for seeking a reduction in user fees as contracts are rebid. No major contracts have been rebid since the new language was included in the budget. Previously, the MDOC worked with the legislature to reduce the cost of phone calls to roughly 1/3 of the former cost (>\$0.20 per minute to \$0.0735). The MDOC also eliminated the PBF commission on several categories of prisoner store products and reduced the commission for other items. The MDOC is currently reviewing bids from service providers for phone services and several other services that must be awarded through the state's competitive bidding process.

Question/Concern: Why did the MDOC require names and an RSVP for the public meeting in May?

Answer: When the MDOC originally secured the room in Lansing, it was told that it would need to provide a list of all attendees for the meeting to comply with state building protocols. It was only on the day of the event that the MDOC was informed that a list was not required for a "public" meeting, which is why individuals were not required to sign in. This process was not utilized for the September meeting but will be dependent on the rules of the host site. Participant lists are not shared within the MDOC beyond the staff that participate in the FAB meetings.

Question/Concern: What is the status of body worn cameras within the MDOC? Can the public report incidents that may have been captured by a body worn camera? Can these reports be made anonymously?

Answer: Body worn cameras are now in use at all MDOC facilities. If the public was a direct party to an incident that may have been captured on a body worn camera, such as during a visit, they can immediately report their concerns to supervisory staff at the facility. The data being captured by the body worn cameras will be overwritten and lost after roughly 18 hours, so it is important that any issues are reported promptly to the

facility. While these reports can be completed via anonymous email, that may prevent the MDOC from preserving the necessary video if key information is missing in the complaint.

Individuals who are incarcerated have access to a form within the facility that they must submit to request that body worn camera data be converted to a video file and retained. This form is required and must be submitted promptly by the incarcerated person to ensure that a video file is created and retained. It is important that if you are speaking with a loved one about an incident they experienced, that you direct them to immediately file a CSJ-881 at their facility, as the form is necessary to preserve potential evidence. Families cannot request the preservation of body worn camera footage on behalf of an incarcerated loved one, they must submit the required form directly.

The MDOC's updated Body Worn Camera Policy can be found at [0404160-Body-Worn-Cameras.pdf](#).

Question/Concern: Will it be communicated to the incarcerated population that they will not need to retake programs simply because the MDOC is adopting a new curriculum?

Answer: Yes, an additional JPay email has been sent to the full male prison population (this change in programming does not impact WHV) updating them on the program changeover and reminding them of the ongoing core curriculum changes and that a completion of either the old or new curriculum will meet their recommendation unless additional programming is recommended by the parole board based on behavior or another specific factor in their case.

Question/Concern: Individuals who admit to substance use disorder are not given the opportunity to treatment or programming and are instead subject to misconducts.

Answer: The MDOC is steadily increasing the availability of SUD related programming within the prisons. While the Department places a significant focus on treatment, it is still tasked with running safe prisons for those that live and work within them. The introduction, sale, and use of illicit substances represent violations of MDOC policy and criminal law that require an appropriate response. This includes misconducts and other potential sanctions. For those waiting to enter formal SUD programming, the MDOC

allows for self-help and other materials that allow individuals to start the process of recovery.

Question/Concern: How do members of the public anonymously file a complaint against a MDOC employee?

Answer: Anonymous complaints can be sent to the MDOC via US mail. Please note that to investigate a complaint, the MDOC needs sufficient information (names, dates, times, alleged conduct, etc.) and the Department will not have the ability to respond to request additional information. As a result, incomplete or inadequately detailed complaints cannot be fully investigated.

Anonymous Concerns Can be Mailed to:

Michigan Department of Corrections

Attn: Executive Bureau

PO Box 30003

Lansing, MI 48909

Question/Concern: The process of ordering books from Amazon and providing appropriate documentation to the facilities is not consistent. What is the process for ordering approved books from this vendor for delivery?

Answer: Books may be ordered from an approved vendor who is listed on the MDOC's website. The order requires documentation (invoice/receipt) to show the recipient, the person who placed the order, the vendor, and the materials. As Amazon does not consistently provide that documentation in the shipped package, it may need to be provided to the facility directly. It can be sent via JPay to the incarcerated loved one or to the appropriate facility staff (generally the Administrative Assistant) for final processing.

Question/Concern: What training does the MDOC do with staff regarding customer service?

Answer: All MDOC staff undergoes yearly training related to customer service. While many MDOC positions have limited contact with the public, the Department expects all employees to exhibit the skills necessary to consistently and professionally engage with the public. Concerns about interactions with individual employees can be brought to the attention of MDOC workplace supervisors at each site.