REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE
Pursuant to P.A. 121 of 2024
Section 303
Retention Strategies

Sec. 303. From the funds appropriated in part 1, the department shall submit a report by March 1 on the department's staff retention strategies. The report must include, but not be limited to, the following:
(a) The department's strategies on how to improve employee engagement, how to improve employee wellness, and how to offer additional training and professional development for employees, including metrics the department is using to measure success of employee wellness programming.
(b) Mechanisms by which the department receives employee feedback in areas under subdivision (a) and how the department considers suggestions made by employees.
(c) Steps the department has taken, and future plans and goals the department has for retention and improving employee wellness.

	INFORMATION AND STRATEGIES
Employee Engagement	The EPIC Section, a division within the Office of Executive Affairs, engages and empowers employees at all levels of the department to drive continuous improvement of departmental processes and outcomes, to assist the department with being more efficient and effective, fostering best practices throughout the department and enhancing employee engagement. EPIC teams are assigned to work on several Strategic Plan objectives. EPIC teams are also assigned to evaluate other areas of the department that process improvement can be beneficial. The EPIC Section established a 501(c)(7) to assist with employee engagement in the department. A new EPIC team is established annually to focus specifically on employee engagement. This team plans engagement activities throughout the year to include various group activities/events, celebrations for Veteran's Week, and Employee Recreation Day engagement events in both the lower peninsula and in the upper peninsula, An EPIC mailbox is available for staff to submit process improvement ideas or best practices. Any idea/recommendation that is submitted to the mailbox is vetted by the appropriate administration and a response is provided to the staff member who submitted the request. To keep all employees informed, information is shared via the department's newsletter and through weekly updates from the Public Information Office. In addition, emails, flyers, and postings are provided to worksites to advertise engagement opportunities.
Employee Wellness	The department continues to grow the Employee Wellness Program's services and resources. The resources are provided to help staff members to maintain health and wellness, while coping with the occupational stressors of the correctional field. The Wellness Unit is a designated team which includes

	Licensed Mental Health Clinicians and Chaplains to provide guidance, assistance, and support. The Wellness Unit services include critical incident response services, 24/7 helpline, brief consultation and counseling, and training support. Wellness Unit Staff ensure MDOC staff, family, and retirees have 24/7 access to professional mental health and support services. The Peer Support, Employee Chaplain, and Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Programs are made up of over 120 active, specially-trained team members who volunteer to be emotional and faith-based support to the MDOC community. The volunteers offer confidential support and assistance to employees, family members and retirees such as crisis support, encouragement, help with communication and coping skills, and referrals for professional services. The Michigan Department of Corrections secured a contract in FY23 with the Memorial University of Newfoundland to conduct a longitudinal study focusing on measuring the Wellness and well-being of MDOC staff. The REACH (Roadmap to Elevate and Advance Correctional Health) project will incorporate a multi-dimensional approach. This study will target all employees in both custody and non-custody environments. Initial introduction phase of the study to the MDOC field is scheduled for early 2025. Unlike past efforts, MDOC staff have been involved at every step of the study design process so that data collection efforts are tailored to unique needs of the MDOC community These efforts will consider organizational structure, shared vocabulary, and cultural context. This research will seek to shift the focus away from identifying problems to evaluating wellness initiatives and best practices. The use of trained response dogs within the MDOC offers a significant value in promoting a sense of change, encouraging employee engagement, and contributing to a more effective crisis response. Heading into its fourth year as a resource of the MDOC Wellness Unit, the Wellness Response Dog program has two dogs now serving in this capacity: Handel (7.5 years old) who was trained initially at the Gus Harrison Correctional Facility, and Franklin (2.5 years old) who transitioned from the Delta Animal Shelter to the Alger Correctional Facility, prior to joining the Wellness Unit. The continued offering of this intervention has served as a resource focused on staff well-being by opening conversations, reducing stress, providing comfort, and increasing productivity and morale. The MDOC Wellness App is available to all members of the MDOC community. The App includes a wellness toolkit addressing 70 behavioral health topics such as fatigue, suicide prevention and alcohol abuse, mental health self-assessments, videos and guides on yoga, mindfulness, nutrition, and more.

Employee Retention	The department continues its commitment to providing specialized training programs that enhance employee engagement, focusing on both personal and professional wellness for fiscal year 2025. Last year, we launched our first-ever Mental Health First Aid training program. This program was developed by the National Council of Mental Wellbeing and supported by the National Institute of Corrections. This 8-hour certification program was originally intended for all correctional professionals who have direct contact with offenders; however, the program was offered to all department employees regardless of their contact status. Building on our commitment to staff well-being, all employees participated in the Stress & Stress Management program in 2024. Developed in collaboration with the Training Division and the Wellness Section, this specialized program offers evidence-based strategies to recognize stress symptoms and access support. Designed as an open discussion, it explores the impact of stress on our work, personal lives, and those around us. The program also introduces practical approaches to reframe our perspective on stress, take intentional steps to manage its effects, and proactively prepare for trauma. These initiatives build upon previous programs that continue to be shared with staff, complementing our Hyper-Vigilance and Overfamiliarity training. Together, these efforts foster a workplace culture that prioritizes employee wellness, resilience, and access to practical stress-management tools. Additionally, they integrate key principles of Emotional Intelligence, helping staff develop self-awareness, regulate emotions effectively, and strengthen interpersonal relationships. As the department moves toward becoming fully trauma-informed, we remain committed to educating staff on recognizing the signs of trauma, understanding recovery pathways, and minimizing triggers that could lead to re-traumatization. By equipping employees with these skills, we empower them to communicate more effectively and provide meaningful support to trauma survivors—both in their professional roles and personal lives. The department continues to expand leadership programs aimed at strengthening employee engagement among Wardens, Supervisors, and Managers. A new initiative began in 2024 that provides comprehensive training and mentorship for all new Wardens, ensuring they are well-prepared for their leadership responsibilities. We also remain committed to offering the FIT Leader program in FY-25, along with statewide training for new Sergeants, Supervisors, and Managers. These leadership programs emphasize skill development, effective communication, and cultivating a positive and supportive work environment. Through these collective efforts, the department provides staff with practical, common-sense tools to maintain balance in both their careers and personal lives, reinforcing a culture of support, resilience, and professional growth. **RETENTION:** The department values our employees and works hard to retain our staff. The department continues to educate people on what it is like to work in corrections, removing the stigma that is associated with prison and showcasing how the department can provide a great career opportunity and benefit package.

Workplace Culture: Part of the Workplace Culture Administrator's role is to review and establish policies, develop training, promote activities within the department that help create a diverse, equitable, and inclusive work environment for all employees. This leads to employees feeling comfortable enough, both physically and mentally, to bring their whole authentic selves to work each day. Having a truly inclusive work environment creates a sense of feeling valued, respected, and part of the organization, which ultimately leads to employee retention.

The department remains focused on recruiting and filling vacancies. In FY 24, we hired 731 non-custody staff, with 699 successfully completing Non-Custody New Employee Training. Additionally, we hired 799 new corrections officers, graduating 722 from Officer Recruit Training. These efforts have played a key role in reducing vacancies, boosting staff morale, and working toward minimizing mandatory overtime. To enhance training effectiveness, the department continues to analyze program survey data from participants in Non-Custody New Employee Training and Officer Recruit Training. This feedback helps measure the impact of each program on job performance and guides improvements in key areas identified by survey results. The department has worked with the Office of State Employer and collective bargaining units to establish Letters of Understanding (LOU) to enhance aspects of certain positions to make them more attractive such as special pay, bonuses etc. For example, in FY 2024 the following LOU's were in place with various collective bargaining units.

MCO
MCO Holiday Overtime Pilot – Extended
MCO Security Unit Recruitment and Retention Pilot

UAW
UAW RN Graduate Bonus Art 43 A4 RN Reclassification Bonus
UAW OSE MDOC LOU Article 15-B RN OT

In May 2023, we kicked off the next phase of the coaching model in partnership with Justice Systems Partners (JSP), with Macomb County Probation and Parole serving as the pilot site. This initiative emphasizes the importance of employee wellness, engagement, and retention by actively involving staff at all levels in shaping strategies aimed at improving the work environment. The pilot site's implementation team focuses on building a supportive infrastructure to foster sustainable organizational change and positive impacts on staff well-being. Staff members are encouraged to contribute ideas for revising policies and processes, ensuring that their voices are heard through ongoing feedback loops. This collaborative approach not only enhances engagement but also empowers staff to take an active role in shaping their work environment. In the fall of 2024, JSP launched a virtual interactive learning platform called *Journeys*, which was piloted with select staff members. The platform is designed to connect, inspire, and support the growth of the coaching community. It offers a space for individuals to read and reflect on others' coaching journeys while also encouraging them to write and share their own, fostering a culture of continuous learning and mutual support that is integral to employee engagement and retention.

The departments Military Veteran Liaison provides support to our military and veteran employees by connecting them to resources and implementing new veteran-focused initiatives to include specialized

	orientation training for all new employees who have served in the Armed Forces. The department has expanded its portfolio with the US Army's Partnership for Your Success (PaYS) program to include seven new positions located within all CFA facilities on the Army's website that guarantees job interviews for military personnel that meet the minimum requirements for each respective position. In FY22 the Military Advisory Committee (MAC) was created and is composed of veterans and reserve members from across all sectors within the department. The MAC works to give the department advice on policy and topics related to the support of military and veteran employees, spouses, and families. The department has moved forward with its strategic goal of establishing a mentoring program for all staff. A new EPIC team has begun designing a program that will provide additional guidance and support to staff in their professional development and will also provide them with mentoring opportunities for future development and growth. The department is actively pursuing multiple initiatives to strengthen recruitment and retention efforts, ensuring a well-trained and sustainable workforce. The EPIC recruitment team has been established to evaluate and recommend innovative strategies for expanding our applicant pools across key roles, including corrections officers, healthcare, mental health and food service. This team is conducting a comprehensive review of barriers impacting recruitment success and assessing current advertising efforts to maximize the effectiveness of contractual investments. By identifying implementing best practices, the team aims to enhance recruitment outcomes and attract a diverse, qualified workforce. In parallel, the department has launched an EPIC Leadership Academy team focused on developing a comprehensive Leadership Academy and curriculum. This initiative is guided by foundational leadership principles designed to support employees at all stages of their careers. The Leadership Academy will provide structured opportunities for professional growth, leadership development, and succession planning, ensuring that our workforce is equipped to lead effectively and drive the departments mission forward. To further address recruitment and retention challenges, the department has engaged a professional consultant to conduct in-depth research on geographic and demographic trends in targeted communities where recruitment and retention barriers exist. This consultant will analyze workforce trends and demographics in key regions; facilitate in person focus groups to gather direct feedback on recruitment challenges and employee experiences; and conduct a thorough review of the department's recruitment and onboarding processes. In conclusion, they will provide a comprehensive analysis and recommendations for improving recruitment strategies and retention efforts. These initiatives represent a strategic commitment to build a stronger, more capable workforce by addressing recruitment barriers, enhancing onboarding processes, and fostering leadership throughout the department.