REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE
Pursuant to P.A. 22 of 2025
Section 302
Retention Strategies

Sec. 302. 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 develop and grow the Employee Wellness Unit. An additional clinician was added in 2025. The Wellness Unit's services and resources are provided to help staff members to develop and maintain a holistic approach to 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 works to 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 100 active, specially trained team members who volunteer to be emotional and faith-based to support the MDOC community. These volunteers partner with the Wellness Unit staff to offer confidential support and assistance to employees, family members and retirees. The Michigan Department of Corrections secured a contract in FY23 with Memorial University of Newfoundland to conduct a longitudinal study to consider 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 throughout CFA, FOA and BOA. The study was introduced to the MDOC community in September of 2025 and data collection began in October. MDOC staff have been integrated into the study design process so that data collection efforts are tailored to unique needs of the MDOC community. The research 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 their efficacy. The use of trained response dogs within the MDOC promotes a sense of change and encourages employee engagement. It also contributes to a more effective crisis response. Heading into its fifth year as a resource of the MDOC Wellness Unit, the Wellness Response Dog program has two dogs now serving in this capacity: Handel (8.5 years old) who was trained initially at the Gus Harrison Correctional Facility, and Franklin (3.5 years old) who transitioned from the Delta Animal Shelter to the Alger Correctional Facility, prior to joining the Wellness Unit. The continued offering of animal assisted services has promoted 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 2026. Last year we authored and delivered a wellness module, focusing on civility. This program was developed through collaboration of the department's Training Division Support Section and Wellness Unit. This 3-hour program was developed in a way that is inclusive to the basic understanding of civility and the intentional actions that are required for its' success. It has also been

	developed to make civility more than a conversation with a post course challenge to help staff be intentional with recognizing moments of positive human connection in the workplace. These initiatives build upon previous programs that continue to be shared with staff, complementing our Hyper-Vigilance, Overfamiliarity training, and Stress Management. 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 to 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. For fiscal year 2026 and leaning into the pathway of being trauma-informed, the department is developing a Wellness course, titled Self-Care. It has been designed to highlight the importance of self-care while working in a professional Corrections environment. It is crucial for managing high stress and preventing burnout. The program discusses what self-care is, why we should lean into self-care, and strategies that work for self-care. The department continues to expand leadership programs aimed at strengthening employee engagement among all staff. In February of 2025, a team was established to provide recommendations on developing a well-structured leadership academy that would guide employees through every stage of their professional development, from new employees through executive leadership. The recommendation for the MDOC LEAD Academy is to ensure leaders at every level have the skills, mindset, and vision to drive organizational success by aligning leadership development with business strategies to create a culture of high-performance innovation and engagement. We also remain committed to offering the FIT Leader program until the contract's expiration in February 2026, 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. It is anticipated that in FY26 the department will have a formal mentoring program for staff using structured mentoring relationships to support employee development, engagement, and career growth. The program will pair experienced staff with other employees to promote personal and professional growth, increase retention, and foster long-term development for both mentors and mentees through a combination of formal and informal settings. 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: The department continues 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 FY25, we hired 510 non-custody staff, with 489 successfully completing Non-Custody New Employee Training. Additionally, we hired 926 new corrections officers, graduating 803 from Officer Recruit Training. These efforts have played a key role in reducing vacancies, boosting staff morale, and working toward minimizing mandatory overtime.

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 2025 the following LOU's were in place with various collective bargaining units. As well as negotiated pay raises.

<u>MCO</u>
MCO Holiday Overtime Pilot – Extended
MCO 5% pay increase for all MCO classifications
MCO compressed pay scale removing the two lower steps in the pay scale

<u>UAW, SEIU, MSEA, NERE</u>
20% increase in pay scale for various classifications under these bargaining units and NERE

The department's Military Veteran Liaison provides support to our military and veteran employees by connecting them to resources and implementing 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 to establishing a SkillBridge internship program across 10 FOA counties. This program allows military service members who are leaving military service an opportunity to intern with a parole and probation office while continuing to receive military pay and benefits. In FY25 the department's Military Advisory Committee (MAC) was expanded to support service members and family members who served. The committee is composed of veterans, reserve members and family members of those who served from across all sectors within the department. There are 20 MDOC employees selected to serve the committee for 18-month terms. The MAC works to provide department level 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 made recommendations to enhance our strategies for expanding our applicant pools across key roles, including corrections officers, healthcare, mental health and food service. This team completed a comprehensive review of barriers impacting recruitment success and assessing current advertising efforts to maximize the effectiveness of contractual investments. By implementing best practices, the team aims to enhance recruitment outcomes and attract a diverse, qualified workforce. 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 has analyzed workforce trends and demographics in key regions; facilitated in person focus groups to gather direct feedback on recruitment challenges and employee experiences; and conducted a thorough review of the department's recruitment and onboarding processes. In alignment with the contract terms, 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.