

## **Correctional Workers March on State Capitol**

### **Local News**

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - Hundreds of Teamster correctional workers, their families, community allies, and other Teamster members rallied on the steps of the state Capitol in Olympia yesterday in an effort to stop the cuts that they say are endangering the lives of prison workers and our communities. Teamsters Local 117 represents more than 6,000 correctional workers throughout the state.

Waving signs reading, "Safety, Dignity, and Respect for Correctional Employees," prison workers from 13 Washington state institutions, many of whom traveled on buses from cities as far away as Monroe, Walla Walla, Spokane, the Tri-Cities, and Clallam Bay, marched from Sylvester Park in Olympia and around the Capitol before assembling for a noontime rally.

Contingents of corrections workers met with legislators in their offices throughout the day on Thursday to inform them of the dangers of the cuts. They also presented the governor with a list of proposed cost-saving measures that the state can implement at the Department of Corrections (DOC) without compromising safety.

In addressing the crowd, correctional employees, state legislators, and Teamsters leaders denounced the cuts as an imminent public safety hazard and emphasized the critical nature of corrections work. "We are no less important than the police who patrol our streets and keep us safe, no less important than the firefighters who run into the burning buildings to save our loved ones," said Carl Granger, a correctional officer at the Monroe Correctional Complex, who spoke at the rally.

"We will fight any cuts that pose a threat to the safety of brave men and women who work inside our state's prison system," said Teamsters Local 117 Secretary-Treasurer Tracey A. Thompson. "Your actions here today send a powerful message to the legislature that we are united in defending our rights to a safe work environment."

Correctional Officer Matt Johnson, who worked for two years as a kitchen sergeant at the Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla, voiced his concern about the state's plans to remove officers from prison kitchens. "With no officers in the kitchen, we will not be able to effectively supervise the inmates or ensure the safety of non-custody staff."

In addition to the elimination of officers in prison kitchens, the reductions at DOC include monthly "modified" lockdowns for offenders, the elimination of counseling services for staff, the reduction of recreational programming for offenders, and the reduction of drug counseling programs for offenders. The state is also planning to close the McNeil Island Corrections Center effective April 1, 2011.

The Teamsters Union has filed a lawsuit seeking injunctive relief in King County Superior Court in an effort to halt the state from implementing provisions of its budget reductions. A hearing for a

motion for preliminary injunction is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, December 14, 2010.