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Department of Correction to Close Sussex Boot Camp

Decision based upon findings in recent facility assessment

The Delaware Department of Correction (DOC), following a thorough assessment of the program's effectiveness in meeting the needs of its offender population, has decided to discontinue the Sussex Boot Camp. The Sussex Boot Camp (SBC), which opened April 15, 1997, is located within the grounds of Sussex Correctional Institution in Georgetown.

Boot Camp operations had been suspended since November 2013, when DOC Commissioner Robert Coupe initiated an Internal Affairs investigation and an administrative review of the Boot Camp operation, including a review of the overall effectiveness of the program. The Commissioner's actions were in response to the arrest of an SBC Drill Instructor for events that allegedly occurred at the facility.

"Our assessment of the Sussex Boot Camp program is complete and we have made a decision to sunset the program at this time," said Commissioner Coupe. "This decision was based upon findings in the assessment of the current format of the Boot Camp that indicate the program does not meet the treatment needs of our offender population. We will explore other program options to meet those needs."

Boot Camp staff was notified of the program's closure Tuesday, February 25, during a meeting with the Commissioner and other Bureau of Prisons officials. All SBC employees have been reassigned within Sussex Correctional Institution.

Long-term future use of the Boot Camp building is yet to be determined, but it is currently being used to house short-term, low-risk inmates.

The review of the Boot Camp was moved up in priority due to the arrest of an SBC employee, but its assessment is part of an ongoing effort by DOC officials to take a thorough look at all offender programs and services.

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"To ensure that we are making the best use of our limited resources to meet the needs of our offender population, we are continuing to assess all offender programs within the Department of Correction," Commissioner Coupe stated.

Excerpt from report prepared by the Research Staff at the University of Delaware's Center for Drug and Alcohol Studies:

The tendency to utilize boot camps across the U.S. proliferated during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Whether due to rising crime rates, rates of incarceration, or their symbolic appeal, boot camps were sought out as a hopeful alternative to traditional prisons. These camps attempted to achieve high levels of discipline and structure by utilizing physical activity, manual labor, drill, and strict rules to limit idleness and govern inmates. Correctional officers became quasi-drill instructors tasked with breaking down inmate resistance while provoking constructive change (Parent 2003). The primary goal of boot camps was to reduce recidivism rates while lowering the prison population and correctional operating costs (Parent 2003).

The concept was brought to Delaware in the early 1990s, based largely on the national publicity and support for the program that had emerged in the 1980s. Delaware's boot camp, after Platoon 1, changed the enrollment of cadets from the target group. Sentencing guidelines and overcrowding led, almost immediately, to a need to fill the boot camp with a population that turned out to be older (≈ 23.5 years), more criminally involved (≈ 13 prior arrests, 4 prior felonies), and less drug addicted, as diversion cases included more dealers and traffickers. This type of clientele shift deviated from the original model; therefore, the fidelity and outcomes of the original program cannot be assessed. However the boot camp model nationally had not proved effective in reducing recidivism, so Delaware's program needed to be judged on its own baseline for recidivism reduction. Outcome studies in Delaware do not appear to demonstrate recidivism reduction for Delaware's boot camp that aligns with the evidence in the national studies reviewed by NIJ.

The lack of demonstrated evidence-based effectiveness for boot camps, either nationally or from the results of the three studies conducted in Delaware by the Statistical Analysis Center (SAC), resulted in a low score on the California Program Assessment Process (CPAP), which is the current method for evaluating DOC programs' evidence base and implementation success.

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