

September 24, 2018  
To: Prison Issues Board  
Re: Visitation

**Below is copied from a May 11, 2015 Public Comment:**

*"C. VISITATION PROGRAM: The MSP Administration has now given back visitation privileges on Thursday's and Friday's. The population and visitors appreciate it, and are still hoping Wednesday's will be allowed. However, there might be consideration given to extending visiting hours on the weekends. FOR EXAMPLE: Visiting hours could start during first shift hours at 8:00am and run until 5 or 6pm. This would greatly improve visiting enjoyment for families that travel from the other side of the state, such as the Billings area. Even for visitors that travel from the western part of the state that travel three or four hours. Extending these hours would most likely eliminate overcrowding and the need to turn tax paying citizens away.*

*There is no valid penological reason to not extend visiting hours on the weekends to enhance rehabilitation. If an inmate is deprived of his ability to maintain his ties to the community and family relations, other forms of rehabilitation are useless. This has been shown through scientific studies over the last 50 years.*

*AN EMERGING PROBLEM: Most all visitors are complaining that they are experiencing adverse treatment by visiting staff when they are processed through the Wallace Building again. This was a problem a few years ago, but was rectified. Now it is raising it's ugly head again. Tax paying visitors deserve the best service possible free of harrassment and condesending comments. They and inmates also desrve a process by which visiting is administered according to the poste4d schedule. Lately, the process they go through is disrespectfull, over-time consuming, and leads to unnecessary delays. Lately, visitors do not see their inmates until about 3:15pm, when they showed up on time for processing at 1:30-2:30pm. Paper work could start while visitor wait in line in their vehicles before they even enter the Wallace Building.*

*Part of the problem is that staff treating inmates like crap throughout the week spills over into the expectation that they can treat their families with the same rude behavior. If you don't agree hang a complaint box up for visitors and see for yourself. why not? Oh, yea that might require the officers involved to follow their written code of ethics. If they did there would be no complaints in a complaint box, or at this meeting. I'm sure the IWF would gladly pay for the expense of the boxes.*

*SOLUTION: Take a survey from inmate visitors and ask what they would like to see as far as visiting schedules and processes that would enhance their experience. Why not? they pay the officers wages. They paid for the building as well. It seems only fair for them to weigh in on such a decision. Would only take 60 days to complete it.*

*Also officers should be trianed to treat inmates and members of the public with dignity and respect.*

*There are officers who treat inmates and families as they should. Hats off to them ... It only takes a few Bad-Apples to make all look bad at the end of the day."*

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I copied the above Public Comment from your website exactly as posted that addresses many concerns about visitation at the Montana State Prison. Our experience is specifically with the Deer Lodge facility. It is very disappointing to see the above Public Comment was made to the Board & they were made aware of the many concerns over 3 years ago & it appears nothing has been done to change anything.

Due to the change of visiting down to only Saturday & Sundays with Saturday being the only day children are allowed it has become very difficult to maintain a reliable time frame of visiting.

In order to even get in at the "starting time" you must arrive & get in the car line at least 2 hours prior to being led onto the property at 2:15. The "Visitor Parking Lot" was created at I am sure a great expense, however no

one enforces the parking there. The most recent Saturday we went there was over 40 cars that we counted & yet only 4 parked in the lot. This is due to the fact that everyone is concerned about being turned away due to too many people.

The same Saturday I am referring too there were over 100 people forced into a small room that is approximately 7'x16' (I am guessing but not exaggerating) that we are made to wait sometimes for almost an hour. What a very scary fire code violation that is & for the state to be the one to ignore the danger this is putting many in is unbelievable.

This is the common practice every visiting day. Upon finally being led into the visitor room for the low side it was 3:40 before our son was finally allowed to come in. At 5:00 we were told we would have to leave as to let others come in. We had 1 hour 20 minutes to visit however the next group had 2 hours 30 minutes. We were told we were the ones to leave as we came from Helena & the ones staying came further. However, we had a child with us & most of the others did not. There is 2 days for adults only to choose from, but we have only 1 day to come with a child plus we are then told to leave at less time than others get at the time we are able to come.

If the 2-day visits are going to continue indefinitely then maybe the hours should change. 1<sup>st</sup> shift goes until 5:30 & 2<sup>nd</sup> shift goes until 7:30. At least then both get equal time if you are asked to leave. Also, on Saturdays if you are there with a child you should not be automatically asked to leave early just because you are from Helena or close. I know of people that are from Kalispell that come Friday night & stay in a motel to come both days. Why do they get the option of 2 full days while we must travel 1.5 hours, wait in the car line for at least 2 hours, wait in the over crowded room for 1 hour to only be told that the time we get to spend with a child is not as important as someone coming from Kalispell with no children for 2 days? Please take another look at this process.

I do agree very strongly that while there are a few Staff members that are decent & nice people, the majority of the ones that we come into contact with are very condescending, rude, talk down to you & make you feel like we are 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens since we have someone inside the prison & treat us like a herd of cattle. To crowd us into a small room while there is a connecting room that they forbid us to move into is nothing short of outrageous, dangerous & violates every safety code there is. There does not seem to be any common-sense reason while 80-100 people all must be processed thru the sign in desk before anyone can be taken out. Please review this process and procedures before someone or many get hurt or worse.

The reasoning given for the Saturday & Sunday only visits may be justified, however, why cannot the hours of visiting starting be increased. Instead of not allowing anyone to be brought onto the property until after 2:30 could change and start earlier. When you finally get to start visiting the 4:00 leave time gives you maybe 20-30 minutes at times. No one is going to leave then so that does not even make sense. This seems almost like vindictive punishment for not only the person inside the prison but for all that want to visit. We may only have 1.5-hour drive vs some others drive time but we cannot come every Saturday & Sunday means not bringing a child & our time is just as valuable & important as anyone else's.

Please look at changing the time schedules to allow more time to visit.

Thank you for taking these visiting concerns seriously as it is obvious it has been an ongoing issue for far too long.

Respectfully submitted,  
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Helena Mt