



# Essex County Sheriff's Department



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## Office of Professional Standards

**Date:** March 31, 2025  
**To:** Kevin F. Coppinger, Sheriff  
**From:** Justina Cositore, Assistant Superintendent, Office of Professional Standards  
**Subject:** Essex County Sheriff's Department 2024 Prison Rape Elimination Act Annual Report

### INTRODUCTION:

The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) was signed into federal law in September 2003 following unanimous support from both parties in the United States Congress. The law aims to provide information, resources, recommendations, and funding to protect individuals from sexual abuse and sexual harassment in confinement facilities. PREA seeks to establish a "Zero Tolerance policy" regarding rape, sexually abusive behavior, and sexual harassment in federal, state, and local correctional systems. PREA also mandated the publication of standards to ensure compliance and to improve prevention, detection, and response strategies in addressing rape, sexually abusive behavior, and sexual harassment.

In August 2012, the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) issued the final PREA standards for: Prisons and Jails, Lockups, Community Confinement Facilities and Juvenile Facilities. These standards require DOJ audits of all facilities under the agency's operational control of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Executive Branch, to include private facilities operating on behalf of the Executive Branch to house inmates. The first three-year audit cycle began in August 2013. Failure to comply with the standards would result in a loss of 5 percent of identified federal grant funding.

The Essex County Sheriff's Department (ECSD) facilities; Essex County Correctional Facility and Sheriff's Headquarters (ECCF), the Essex County Pre-Release and Re-Entry Center (ECPRC) and the Women in Transition Center (WIT) were accredited by the DOJ PREA audit in 2016. The ECSD maintained accreditation with a successful DOJ PREA audit in 2019.

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On March 28-April 1 of 2022, a PREA audit was conducted at the ECCF, ECPRC, and the WIT. All three facilities were reaccredited by the Department of Justice, with the auditor finding ECSD meeting 45 out of 45 PREA standards. No corrective action was found to be necessary. The ECSD remains committed to a Zero-Tolerance policy for all forms of sexual harassment and sexually abusive behavior. As such, the ECSD welcomes the next PREA audit occurring at all three of its facilities in April of 2025, as a chance to demonstrate its continued dedication to meeting the PREA standards set forth by the DOJ.

**BACKGROUND:**

The DOJ PREA standards require ECSD to collect a defined dataset for each investigation of sexual abuse and harassment. These standards further require the Essex County Sheriff's Department to aggregate and review that data to assess and improve our effectiveness as an agency at preventing, detecting, and responding to PREA allegations. Standards related to the collection of data include: § 115.87 Data Collection, § 115.88 Data Review for Corrective Action and § 115.89 Data Storage, Publication, and Destruction. For reference purposes, they are included within this report.

***§ 115.87 Data Collection***

- a. The agency shall collect accurate, uniform data for every allegation of sexual abuse at facilities under its direct control using a standardized instrument and set of definitions.
- b. The agency shall aggregate the incident-based sexual abuse data at least annually.
- c. The incident-based data collected shall include, at a minimum, the data necessary to answer all questions from the most recent version of the Survey of Sexual Violence conducted by the Department of Justice.
- d. The agency shall maintain, review, and collect data as needed from all available incident-based documents, including reports, investigation files, and sexual abuse incident reviews.
- e. The agency also shall obtain incident-based and aggregated data from every private facility with which it contracts for the confinement of its inmates.
- f. Upon request, the agency shall provide all such data from the previous calendar year to the Department of Justice no later than June 30.

***§ 115.88 Data Review for Corrective Action***

- a. The agency shall review data collected and aggregated pursuant to § 115.87 to assess and improve the effectiveness of its sexual abuse prevention, detection, and response policies, practices, and training, including by:
  1. Identifying problem areas.
  2. Taking corrective action on an ongoing basis; and,
  3. Preparing an annual report of its findings and corrective actions for each facility, as well as the agency as a whole.
- b. Such report shall include a comparison of the current year's data and corrective actions with those from prior years and shall provide an assessment of the agency's progress in addressing sexual abuse.
- c. The agency's report shall be approved by the agency head and made readily available to the public through its website or, if it does not have one, through other means.

- d. The agency may redact specific material from the reports when publication would present a clear and specific threat to the safety and security of a facility but must indicate the nature of the material redacted.

***§ 115.89 Data Storage, Publication, and Destruction***

- a. The agency shall ensure that data collected pursuant to § 115.87 are securely retained.
- b. The agency shall make all aggregated sexual abuse data, from facilities under its direct control and private facilities with which it contracts, readily available to the public at least annually through its website or, if it does not have one, through other means.
- c. Before making aggregated sexual abuse data publicly available, the agency shall remove all personal identifiers.
- d. The agency shall maintain sexual abuse data collected pursuant to § 115.87 for at least 10 years after the date of the initial collection unless Federal, State, or local law requires otherwise.

**INVESTIGATIVE STANDARDS/DEFINITIONS:**

The definitions used by the DOJ are extensive for each category of abuse and misconduct. Below are those definitions:

- a. Evidentiary Standard: The agency shall impose no standard higher than a preponderance of the evidence in determining whether allegations of sexual abuse or sexual harassment are substantiated.
  - 1. Substantiated: An allegation that was investigated and determined to have occurred.
  - 2. Unsubstantiated: An allegation that was investigated and the investigation produced insufficient evidence to make a final determination as to whether or not the event occurred.
  - 3. Investigation ongoing: Evidence is still being gathered, processed, or evaluated, and a final determination has not yet been made.
  - 4. Unfounded: An allegation that was investigated and determined not to have occurred.
- b. Incidents of sexual violence or sexual harassment (inmate-on-inmate):
  - 1. Nonconsensual Sexual Acts: Sexual contact of any person without his or her consent, or of a person who is unable to consent or refuse; and contact between the penis and the vulva or the penis and the anus including penetration, however slight; or contact between the mouth and the penis, vulva, or anus; or penetration of the anal or genital opening of another person, however slight, by a hand, finger, or other instrument.
  - 2. Abusive Sexual Contacts: Sexual contact of any person without his or her consent, or of a person who is unable to consent or refuse; AND intentional touching, either directly or through the clothing, of the genitalia, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh, or buttocks of any person. Exclude incidents in which the contact was incidental to a physical altercation.
  - 3. Sexual Harassment: Repeated and unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or verbal comments, gestures, or actions of a derogatory or offensive sexual nature by one inmate directed towards another.
- c. Incidents of sexual violence or sexual harassment (staff-on-inmate):
  - 1. Staff Sexual Misconduct: Any behavior or act of a sexual nature directed toward an inmate by an employee, volunteer, contractor, official visitor, or other agency representative (excluding family, friends, or other visitors.) Sexual relationships of a romantic nature between staff and inmates are included in this definition. Consensual or nonconsensual sexual acts include intentional touching of the genitalia, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh, or buttocks that is unrelated

to official duties or with the intent to abuse, arouse, or gratify sexual desire or completed, attempted, threatened, or requested sexual acts, or occurrences of indecent exposure, invasion of privacy, or staff voyeurism for reasons unrelated to official duties or for sexual gratification.

2. Staff Sexual Harassment: Repeated verbal comments or gestures of a sexual nature to an inmate by an employee, volunteer, contractor, official visitor, or other agency representative (exclude family, friends, or other visitors). This includes demeaning references to gender or sexually suggestive or derogatory comments about body or clothing, or repeated profane or obscene language or gestures.

**INVESTIGATIVE FINDINGS:**

A complete review of all PREA allegations reported to the ECSD’s Special Investigations Unit (SIU) was conducted. This review encompassed allegations from all three ECSD facilities. There was a total of 61 allegations reported in 2024. Eight (8) allegations did not meet the criteria/definition of a PREA case.

A total of 33 allegations were reported to ECSD officials as having occurred at other agencies and outside of ECSD custody. In accordance with 115.63 of the DOJ PREA standards, those allegations were referred to their respective agencies.

The remaining 20 allegations were reported as having occurred at the ECSD. There were no allegations of incidents at the ECPRC in 2024. There were no allegations of incidents at the WIT during 2024.

Below is a summary and comparison of the investigations from 2024, 2023, and 2022.

**2024 Investigation Findings**

Category	Investigative Outcomes				
	Substantiated	Unsubstantiated	Unfounded	Pending	Line Total
Inmate-Inmate Sex Acts	1	3	0	0	4
Inmate-Inmate Sexual Abuse Contact	0	9	0	0	9
Inmate-Inmate Sexual Harassment	0	0	0	0	0
Inmate-Inmate Other	0	0	1	0	1
Staff Sexual Misconduct	0	4	0	0	4
Staff-Inmate Sexual Harassment	0	2	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>20</b>

## 2023 Investigation Findings

Category	Investigative Outcomes				Line Total
	Substantiated	Unsubstantiated	Unfounded	Pending	
Inmate-Inmate Sex Acts	0	4	1	0	5
Inmate-Inmate Sexual Abuse Contact	0	5	2	0	7
Inmate-Inmate Sexual Harassment	0	8	1	0	9
Staff Sexual Misconduct	0	2	3	0	5
Staff-Inmate Sexual Harassment	0	3	1	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>30</b>

## 2022 Investigation Findings

Category	Investigative Outcomes				Line Total
	Substantiated	Unsubstantiated	Unfounded	Pending	
Inmate-Inmate Sex Acts	0	1	1	0	2
Inmate-Inmate Sexual Abuse Contact	1	2	0	0	3
Inmate-Inmate Sexual Harassment	2	5	0	0	7
Inmate-Inmate Other	0	3	1	0	4
Staff Sexual Misconduct	0	2	0	0	2
Staff-Inmate Sexual Harassment	0	1	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>19</b>

### TRENDS:

From 2022 to 2024, the ECSD investigated a total of 69 allegations. A total of four allegations were substantiated. This represents approximately 5.7% of incidents being substantiated, which is 2% higher than the result of the three prior years. From 2023 to 2024, the ECSD saw a roughly 33% decrease in investigated allegations.

ECSD continues to conduct orientation for civilian vendors, volunteers, interns, and contractors. The training emphasizes the importance of PREA and explains its history, methodology of reporting allegations, and responsibilities of staff in response to allegations.

The inmate population receives timely orientation after initial intake where they are informed of their right to remain free from all forms of sexual harassment and assault while in ECSD custody. The inmate population receives numerous methods of reporting allegations of sexual harassment and assault (ECSD tip hotline, verbal or in writing to any staff member, District Attorney's Office through writing or hotline, National Sexual Assault Hotline, and Third-Party Reporting).

A concerted effort is continually put forth by staff when conducting Vulnerability and Predatory Risk Assessments to inform the inmate population as to the reason and need for the assessments. This approach generates open dialogue with the inmate population and promotes an environment in which allegations can be reported without fear of retaliation and discrimination.

**IDENTIFIED PROBLEM AREAS AND CORRECTIVE ACTIONS:**

The DOJ PREA standards require an agency to identify any problem areas and develop plans of corrective action(s) to remedy them. There were no obvious problem areas which were not already being addressed through our efforts to achieve compliance with PREA standards and our demonstrated compliance with the PREA standards and our successful DOJ PREA audit in 2022. However, the ECSD continues to evaluate, and when necessary, improve its current policies, procedures, and practices to continue to meet and exceed the DOJ standards, to keep its inmates/residents safe and free from sexual harassment and abuse.

In 2024, the ECSD began multiple construction projects that were completed, and some that are still ongoing. As construction is completed, and buildings are reconfigured for inmate use, the ECSD assesses and ensures that any new, possible vulnerable areas are properly addressed before being opened to inmate/resident movements. At the ECCF, areas under the stairwells of various buildings were determined to be potentially vulnerable areas and are currently being addressed. At the ECPRC, new cameras have been added as various construction projects are completed.

The ECSD continues to provide comprehensive PREA education and training to all staff, contractors, volunteers, vendors, and inmates on the ECSD's Zero Tolerance policy on all forms of sexual harassment and sexual assaults. Additionally, the ECSD continues to work with outside stakeholders collaboratively to ensure the Department meets and/or exceeds the PREA standards as set forth by the DOJ.

**ASSESSMENT OF THE ECSD's PROGRESS IN ADDRESSING INMATE SEXUAL HARASSMENT and ABUSE:**

The Essex County Sheriff's Department was a grateful recipient of U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, and Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2020 Implementing the PREA Standards, Protecting Inmates, and Safeguarding Communities, Grant Award. Last year, 2024, was the final year for this federal funding, which was strategically utilized to assist in providing mental health clinicians for the inmate population, as well as for PREA mirrors and new camera systems. The ECSD is always in search of new funding opportunities to serve its population. The Department continues to work with Wellpath, its contracted medical provider, to provide timely and efficient mental health care to inmates/residents who have been impacted by sexual abuse/harassment. Additionally, the ECSD continues to work with the YWCA of Northeastern Massachusetts to support the existing Memorandum of Understanding between our two agencies. This partnership provides counseling services and victim advocates for victims of sexual abuse and harassment.

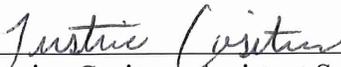
In 2024 the following staff members were added to the PREA Team:

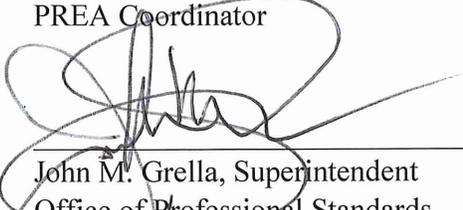
- Assistant Superintendent, PREA Coordinator Justina Cositore
- Assistant Superintendent, Director of Special Investigations Unit, Glen Coletti
- Assistant Superintendent, Director of Compliance and Inspection, Raymond Arcand

The ECSD is diligently working to improve in all areas of PREA implementation and continues to make great strides in the prevention, detection, and response to all allegations of sexually abusive behaviors and sexual harassment.

We are proud of our staff at all levels throughout the ECSD as we have consistently demonstrated our commitment to the Prison Rape Elimination Act by having all our facilities accredited through the DOJ PREA audit process. We are currently working towards another successful PREA audit, in April of 2025, continuing to demonstrate this dedication of all our staff which allows for safe facilities for both inmates and employees.

The undersigned have jointly reviewed the Essex County Sheriff's Department 2024 Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) Annual Report on: 3/31/2025

  
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Justina Cositore, Assistant Superintendent  
PREA Coordinator

  
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John M. Grella, Superintendent  
Office of Professional Standards

  
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Essex County Sheriff's Department