



SEPTEMBER IS NATIONAL SUICIDE AWARENESS MONTH



Let's Be: Union Safe, Union Strong!

The last several months are a prime example of just how difficult a career in Corrections can be. We've had to provide laser focus to keep facilities safe, in a climate and a situation where even knowing what that takes is difficult, and reaching those goals, despite clear progress in putting member safety at the forefront with things like the new "Chief Safety Officer," is a daily challenge.

The month of September is set aside for reflection on those whom the struggles impact in the most profound way. The color associated with this remembrance is green. As we remember our fallen AFSCME union brothers and sisters during Suicide Awareness month, let us also remember and commit to addressing some relevant facts for all of us.

FACT: According to a 2011 study conducted by Desert Waters, Correctional Employees suffer PTSD at more than double the rate of active combat veterans: 34% for corrections vs 14% for military veterans.

PTSD, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, is a very serious and insidious condition, and identifying and addressing it is at the heart of recent and ongoing joint efforts between the IDOC through Staff Wellness Response initiatives, and AFSCME Council 31 through our landmark union-side Personal Support Program.

FACT: Untreated PTSD or mental health problems in general are extremely dangerous to our workplace safety – last year alone, there were 12 suicides in IDOC. That's one union family member lost, between each monthly meeting!

Anyone suffering, through no fault of their own but merely because they work in an environment inherently prone to causing or exacerbating these conditions, is at increased risk of harm – either from workplace violence they may not be currently equipped to handle appropriately, or self-harm in myriad ways, to help deal with the psychological trauma undergone.

FACT: Suicide rates in Corrections are twice as high as both police officers, and the general public.

This is a silent, and deadly manifestation of the observation—that Correctional work is not talked about nor recognized as the very difficult and demanding profession that it clearly is.

Correctional employees must recognize this grave and important challenge every bit as much as we hope the public can see and appreciate our efforts, and our sacrifices. This month is a chance for all of us to talk about this critical problem, to work together to find solutions and answers, and mostly, to show our solidarity with each other because in that, is our strength.

Wear your "Union Safe, Union Strong" wristband with union pride! Feel it on your arm as a tangible symbol of the strength in unity we all rely on as union members. And take a look inside, when you need to, confident in the knowledge that there is a way to get help as needed.

If you need any help, or know co-workers who do, please share this message of hope and solidarity with them – not to mention, the phone number for our Personal Support Program: (800) 647-8776.

Stay safe, stay strong...
And remember that TOGETHER, we are AFSCME Strong!

