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N.J. taxpayers have been billed \$1M to investigate women's prison, records show

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Abuse at New Jersey's only women's prison continues to cost residents.

The outside law firm that produced a damning new report about the facility has billed the state a little more than \$361,000, according to invoices obtained through a public records request.

If those costs are approved, Lowenstein Sandler LLP will have earned about \$1 million for work concerning the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility in Hunterdon County.

The 73-page investigation released Monday concluded that prison officials were often ignorant about basic policies and staff histories, and it already pushed Gov. Phil Murphy to announce plans to close the prison and the corrections commissioner to resign.

The report was written by former state comptroller Matthew Boxer and colleagues Rachel Moseson Dikovics, Jamie Gottlieb Furia, Rasmeet Chahil and Amanda Cipriano, the governor's office said. Each was paid \$400 an hour, while paralegals could earn \$90 an hour, according to the retention agreement.

Parts of the review were redacted, including most of a page that appeared to depict a conversation between two prison leaders shortly before several women said they were pulled from their cells and severely beaten early this year.

On the night of Jan. 11, the report says the prison's then-associate administrator, Sean St. Paul, called the department's central office and had a "dialogue" with Michelle Ricci, who at the time was deputy commissioner.

But the details of their exchange were blacked out.

The redaction is temporary, according to a statement from the governor, because the attorney general's office said "making those portions of the report public at this time would interfere with the ongoing criminal investigation."

Ten officers have been charged so far. St. Paul was one of dozens suspended after the incident, and Ricci took personal leave and has been at least temporarily replaced, according to a prison spokeswoman.

Boxer's firm previously advised state officials amid a multi-year federal inquiry into sexual abuse at the same facility. That review will likely result in oversight from the U.S. Department of Justice — which will bring its own price tag.

“It’s gonna be expensive,” Pennsylvania Secretary of Corrections John Wetzel said in a recent interview about prison reform in general. “You can look at staffing, you can look at additional training, it will have a cost.”

New Jersey is also expected to pay \$1.2 million to a consultant, almost \$2.8 million to another outside law firm and more than \$20 million to women who said they were sexually abused or harassed behind bars.