

September 18, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: SHERIFF JOHN SMITH
Sheriff

FROM: CHIEF DIANA TRUEBA VEGA
Chief of Police

SUBJECT: PROPOSED CORRECTIONAL POLICY CHANGE

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to our lives. Law enforcement and the correctional system has not been immune to those challenges. The Covid-19 pandemic has greatly affected law enforcement and the correctional system. According to Module 1: Presentation 1 presented by Dr. Fritsvold, an estimated 500,000 people are currently serving their time in local county jails. With the current Covid-19 pandemic we are facing, it has become evident policy changes within the correctional system are necessary in order to protect the health and safety of these incarcerated individuals and the people they contact.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an increase of Covid-19 outbreaks throughout the country. The outbreaks have occurred at churches, businesses, restaurants, and gatherings. Another place that has been victim to large Covid-19 outbreaks has been our local county jails. We have learned that the impact Covid-19 outbreaks in jails can be far-reaching, well beyond the four walls of the jail. One of those Covid-19 outbreaks occurred at our local Fresno County Jail. In early July, 643 inmates tested positive for Covid-19. Six hundred forty-three infected inmates out of a total population of 1,200 inmates is an alarming number.

Inmates come in daily contact with corrections officers, bailiffs, attorneys, jail nurses, probation or parole officers, civilian visitors, as well as people outside the confines of the jail if they are working off-site as a trustee. While the number of Covid-19 infections resulting from subjects that came in contact with infected inmates is unknown, it is imperative policy change occurs now to prevent the future spread of illness and disease within and outside the jail.

The proposed policy change will implement screening for any incoming inmates. The screening will consist of a health questionnaire asking if the inmate has been

experiencing Covid-19 symptoms, and identifying if they have been in contact with anyone diagnosed with the virus or with someone suspected of having the virus. Fourteen-day isolation of any incoming inmates will occur in classification pods after they complete the booking process successfully. If it is suspected the inmate has the virus, or they have been in contact with someone diagnosed or suspected of having the virus, the inmate will be isolated in a separate location and provided medical aid as needed.

The proposed policy change will stop in-person visitation at the Fresno County Jail. Distance visitations will replace the in-person visitations through Zoom. Visitors will be provided information on how to download an app that will provide them access to a distance visitation. The zoom distance visitations will also be available for attorneys or outside agencies needing to interview an inmate.

Everyone requesting entry into the jail will be screened before being allowed entry. The screening will include a series of questions and a temperature check. Correctional officers will also be subject to the screening at the beginning of each work shift. If a visitor from an outside agency is known to have come in contact with someone infected with the virus, suspected of coming into contact with someone infected with the virus, or they are symptomatic, they will be refused entry into the facility. If a correctional officer is known to have come in contact with someone infected with the virus, suspected of coming into contact with someone infected with the virus, or they are symptomatic, they will be sent home to quarantine until cleared by a doctor.

Suspending visitations has proven effective by at least fourteen Massachusetts' Sheriffs as presented by Essex County Sheriff Kevin Coppinger, and by the Durham County Sheriff's Office. Isolating inmates for fourteen days after booking before being placed in the general population has also proven effective in minimizing the spread of the virus, as presented by Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Lieutenant Reggie Marinelli.

The history of corrections has shown jails have the potential of spreading disease easily, and the spread of the disease does not stay within the confines of the jail. If a virus or disease exists at the jail, there is a real threat to spreading the disease back into society. British Aristocrat John Howard wrote a book in 1777, named *Black Assize of 1577*. In the book, Howard highlighted prisoners sick with typhus fever were transported from the jail to the courthouse. Within a period of forty hours, more than 300 people that were also present in court died of typhus fever. Howard also mentioned sick prisoners that were released from jail spread the disease once they were free. Many of the people infected by recently released prisoners died as a cause of the infection.

As law enforcement leaders, it is our responsibility to ensure prisoners serve their debt to society. It is also our responsibility to provide prisoners with a facility with active safety measures and procedures in place.

- Screening incoming inmates will protect their health, the health of inmates already at the facility, as well as the health of any other correctional employee, attorney, or visitor that comes into contact with them.
- The screening of anyone entering the facility will ensure entry is denied to anyone that is either exhibiting symptoms of the virus or that has come into contact with anyone diagnosed with the virus or suspected of having the virus.
- Screening correctional officers at the beginning of their shifts will ensure officers are sent home to quarantine if they do not pass the screening. Allowing for a correctional officer to work if they are suspected of being sick with the virus, or exposed to it, could endanger the health and safety of the inmates.
- The last proposed change of allowing Zoom visitations instead of in-person visitations will do away with any unnecessary outside exposure to the inmates. This change will ensure no inmate can infect a visitor, and then the visitor carries the virus out into the rest of society. It will also ensure the visitor cannot bring the virus into the jail and infect the rest of the jail population.

The proposed changes will undoubtedly help to protect the health and safety of the correctional officers, probation and parole officers, arresting officers, attorneys, medical personnel, as well as the families and friends of those incarcerated individuals. Healthy inmates translate to healthy communities.

References:

LEPSL 500 FA2020, Module 1 Presentation *“Corrections in America: History, Structure, and Current Issues”*

Fresno Bee, July 3, 2020, *“643 People Have Tested Positive for Covid-19 at Fresno County Jail, Officials Say”*

PERF Daily Covid-19 Report, *“Next, let’s check in again with Sheriffs,”* Retrieved from <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch31>

PEFT Daily Covid-19 Report, *“Reducing Jail Populations,”* Retrieved from <https://www.policeforum.org/covidmarch25>