



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Governor Tony Evers / Secretary Kevin A. Carr

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Video Visits Keep Those in DOC Care Connected to Loved Ones during Pandemic

MADISON – The Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) is using technology to keep those in its care connected to loved ones during a pandemic that has limited physical interaction.

The DOC moved to quickly suspend in-person visitation at the onset of the pandemic in Wisconsin, but the agency has since worked to install the necessary technology and provide enough computers to facilitate video visits at all of its institutions.

“The feedback from PIOC who have had video visitation has been positive, with many comments of how nice it was to see a family member or friend’s face,” said Green Bay Correctional Institution Warden, Dylon Radtke. “In several circumstances, a video visit was able to connect a person in our care with someone in their life who was ill, providing the opportunity to be with them during a time of need.”

Over the first 23 days of August, people in the care of the DOC completed more than 7,000 video visits across more than 20 of the agency’s institutions. Those at Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution completed nearly 600 calls over that time, those at Oshkosh Correctional more than 700 and those at Stanley Correctional more than 800. Racine Correctional Institution logged more than 1,600 video visits over the entire month of August.

“While phone calls, letters, and emails are good forms of communication, they simply do not replace the connection of being able to see another person’s face, see them smile and laugh, their expressions and gestures. Video visitation provides the option of connecting in a way more beneficial,” Radtke said.

The technology has opened up new opportunities for those in DOC care who have loved ones who cannot visit in person because they live out of state, lack transportation or various other reasons.

That’s why Radtke is among the wardens who say they would advocate for keeping video visitation as an option post pandemic. The DOC’s Division of Juvenile Corrections Administrator, Ron Hermes, feels the same and has already stated video visits will remain an option for youth at Lincoln Hills School/Copper Lake School in Irma, even after in-person visits resume.

“Zoom calls are definitely a positive that has come out of this terrible pandemic. Youth in our care are engaging with their families at a level that has surpassed what we thought was possible,” Hermes said earlier this summer.

Youth interviewed by the court-mandated Monitor for the schools noted that they miss in-person visits, but that they have enjoyed video visits with their families. It has allowed them to not just see their loved ones, but to see their homes again, and maybe a favorite room or pet.

Youth at the schools have had a combined 1192 video visits since March 26, and 41% of youth who completed a survey regarding their video visits indicated they had not previously received an in-person visit.