

COVID-19 RESPONSE

A MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY KEVIN A. CARR



Monday, November 2, 2020

Friends and Colleagues,

The last couple of months have been difficult ones in our state. Wisconsin is among the country's COVID-19 hotspots with 228,863 positive cases reported as of November 1, 2020. While I very much look forward to the day we return to normal operations, the recent rise in cases reminds me that my first priority remains the health and safety of staff and Persons in our Care (PIOC). Much like our state, our agency has seen a recent, significant spike in COVID-19 positive cases at a number of our institutions, and I'm sure it has taken an emotional toll on our staff, those in our care and their loved ones. I want to assure every person that our agency will continue to exhaust every resource available to us in an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and to protect both PIOC and staff at all of our secure facilities and throughout our agency.

I recognize that, by nature of their design, correctional institutions can present unique challenges to mitigating the spread of any communicable disease especially when it comes to social distancing. Prisons across the nation are feeling the impact this virus can have when COVID-19 is presented in a facility. As a result, we know our efforts must focus on clear steps to combat the spread of this virus and mitigate risk wherever possible. Our team of dedicated staff have implemented coordinated response efforts through our Emergency Operations Center, and we continue to work with state, local and federal public health officials on additional precautionary measures and responses. One such measure is our testing efforts. Early on, the DOC recognized proactive testing as a crucial step to quickly identify positive cases. To date, our agency has conducted 52,156 total tests for PIOC. Through these tests, we can identify positive cases and better quarantine and isolate, a key to controlling further spread.

We have implemented a number of unprecedented changes to our operations as a result of this pandemic. We recognize many of these changes can place a burden on our staff, those in our care, their families and loved ones. Much like in our communities, activities in our secure facilities have either stopped or look dramatically different than they once did. Most of our institutions have limited movement, we have suspended in-person visitations, transitioned to virtual visits and implemented technology wherever possible. Our staff have also had to adapt to new daily routines like enhanced cleaning and sanitation efforts, complying with passive and medical screenings to enter buildings, and wearing face coverings.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

A MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY KEVIN A. CARR



Making numerous changes in such a short period of time to an organization as large as ours can be difficult, and we know that even with our best planning and efforts, several of our institutions have experienced sizeable outbreaks. But there are opportunities to learn from these outbreaks and we continue to make improvements to our responses as we discover more about this virus. We have learned that unified leadership, organized planning and enhanced communication have been keys to success. Additionally, we have recognized the immense value of having a dedicated health care team working around the clock to help those in our care stay healthy and to provide those who are ill the necessary medical care to recover. All of our efforts help us to slow the spread of COVID-19 and help the infected recover.

Since the onset of the pandemic, DOC has reduced the PIOC population in our facilities by more than 2,500 persons resulting in the lowest Wisconsin prison population level since 2002. Increases in the number of persons released due to our expansion of the Earned Release Program or ERP have also contributed to reduced population numbers. Additionally, in our Division of Community Corrections there are almost 1,500 less persons on supervision in county jails statewide than there was at the start of the year.

Our agency remains committed to keeping the public informed of changes in our operations as they develop. The best source of information will continue to be this public website (doc.wi.gov/COVID19). I encourage individuals to check the page frequently for up-to-date information on our response to COVID-19. DOC has also been following guidance provided by [Wisconsin DHS](#) and [CDC](#). More information can be found on the DHS and CDC websites.

I want to thank you all again for your continued patience during this difficult time. Please stay safe and healthy, and know that we can and will get through this crisis together.

Sincerely,

Kevin A. Carr
Wisconsin Department of Corrections Secretary