

I wanted to take a few minutes today to write to the friends and family members of the Persons in DOC's Care to share my thoughts, and respond to some of the questions and concerns I have heard recently. As Secretary of the Department of Corrections (DOC), one of my responsibilities is to ensure the proper care of individuals in our custody. For friends and loved ones of someone who may be incarcerated, I understand how vitally important their care is to you, and because of this, it is important to me. This may include their daily care such as hygiene, ongoing medical care, educational/programming opportunities and the ability to stay connected to friends and family. While no system is perfect, I am proud of how our agency continuously works to improve the ways in which we ensure proper care is taken for each and every person who enters our doors.

Our main focus over the last two years has been maintaining the health and safety of those in our care, our staff and our communities. This includes recent temporary changes to entry and COVID-19 protocols at our adult facilities. We wouldn't take these steps if we didn't feel they were vital to keeping those in our care safe and healthy, and we believe that by taking these precautions now, we will have a better chance of returning to normal visitation and entry protocols in the near future.

The good news is the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases have been steadily declining in both our state and in our institutions. As of February 23, 2022, we had 85 positive cases of COVID-19 within our facilities out of the approximately 20,000 total Persons In Our Care. We continue to watch these numbers closely in an effort to reintroduce in-person visits as soon as possible.

I'm encouraged when I hear Wisconsin's top medical officer, Dr. Ryan Westergaard, recently stated COVID-19 could become endemic this year. While the DHS Chief Medical Officer warns case counts could periodically spike, it is still likely numbers overall will stay fairly constant in 2022. I hope this news is as reassuring to you all as it is to me. However, should we experience a concerning increase in our positivity rate, you can be assured we will take measures to prioritize the safety of the Persons In Our Care. While we will remain cautious, our leadership team continues to plan for how we can continue on a path towards a new normalcy in our agency, while continuing to take the necessary efforts to keep our staff and your loved ones safe.

Through our robust vaccination efforts, we continue to see the needle move in the right direction and bring us one step closer to our goal of resuming normal operations. As of today, 81% of those in our care have been fully vaccinated, and 69.4% of those eligible have received a booster dose. This is an amazing number and each of you should be proud of how your loved ones have stepped up and done their part to keep themselves and others safe.

Before concluding, I would like to address one other area of concern I've heard from many of you related to DOC's vacancy concerns. Like most other corrections agencies and businesses across the country, our agency has not been immune to staffing shortages. However, I feel it is important to share with you all that despite the vacancies, our staff continue to work hard each day to provide the necessary care to your loved ones. From providing programming opportunities, to recreation and work release, our staff are committed to ensuring the Persons In Our Care have every opportunity available to them to meet adequate living standards and prepare them for eventual and successful release into the community.

Our agency continues to explore both new and proven strategies to welcome more people into our agency. We continue to increase our presence at job fairs and outreach efforts and work with technical colleges and high schools. Additionally, we continue to explore new strategies like

recruiting through social media, truck wraps, and the TV spots you may have noticed during Brewers and Bucks games.

I'm extremely proud of how our staff have balanced the increased safety protocols brought upon us by COVID, with working towards a goal of maintaining normal operations where they are able to do so safely. If you are given the chance, please join me in thanking the DOC staff who continue to show up to work each and every day and give their all in the face of an unprecedented situation. I know they appreciate your patience when concerns are brought to their attention.

For those of you who do have concerns about loved ones in our care, I would highly encourage you to work through the chain of command at the institution level to resolve these issues. This is the fastest way to have your concerns addressed. Those in our care know the proper chain of command at their institution and can help guide you through this process.

Thank you for your patience and dedication to the safety and wellbeing of those in our care. Again, please know that the DOC always considers the health and safety of those in our care, our staff and Wisconsin communities before every decision.

I wish you all good health.

Kevin A. Carr, DOC Secretary