



Fraternal Order of Police

Department of Corrections Labor Committee

711 4TH Street, Northwest
Washington, DC 20001

PRESS RELEASE MARCH 29, 2020

Today we learned that the 50-year-old wife of one of our corrections officers, a 29-year veteran, is infected with COVID-19. She is hospitalized in serious condition. Her husband, our officer and friend, has been tested for COVID-19, but his results are not available. We also learned that two inmates most recently testing positive at the Jail for COVID-19 are among the 65 inmates who were quarantined after exposure to a COVID positive U.S. Marshal at Superior Court. That quarantine lasted for only two days, when DOC's Public Information Officer Keena Blackman announced that the quarantine was being lifted without any of those inmates being tested. The reason given by Dr. Blackman follows:

After sending out yesterday's Open Letter we learned through the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the DC Department of Health (DC Health) full investigation into the U.S. Marshal's contact tracing that none of the DOC residents were in contact with the individual. The quarantine has been lifted.

Our conclusion from this is that the "tracing" and "investigations" conducted by the DOC, by United Health at the D.C. Jail, and by the DC Department of Health are ineffective.

The FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE LABOR COMMITTEE for the D.C. Department of Corrections (FOP/DOC) is issuing this Press Release to correct and supplement information issued by various organizations regarding conditions at the D.C. Jail, namely: the Executive Office of the Mayor, the Department of Corrections, Deputy Mayor Kevin Donahue, Councilmember and Chair of the Public Safety Committee Charles Allen, the United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, and various media.

Since early March, FOP/DOC and its counsel HANNON LAW GROUP have attempted to engage in a dialogue with the leadership at the D.C. Jail, with the Mayor, and with the City Council to assist in the management of the COVID-19 crisis at the Jail. Our efforts have been rejected. DOC long ago ceased its regular labor/management meetings.

Our conclusion is two-fold: (1) the City does not have the resources to combat COVID-19, and the Jail is the lowest priority among the health and safety community;

and, (2) the City wants to keep the truth from the public. The Mayor said as much at a recent press conference when she announced that corrections officers will not be provided with protective equipment because the officers do not provide medical care.

The Public Defender Service is correct that DOC is not following the “Guidance on Management of COVID-19 at Correctional and Detention Facilities”, issued and updated regularly by the Center for Disease Control. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) recommended by CDC is not present at the Jail for corrections officers or is in short supply and hoarded by supervisors under lock and key. Cleaning and disinfection of the Housing Units is inadequately performed by inmates, and the Department of Health has not conducted inspections of the Housing Units to our knowledge.

In the meantime, the administrative wing of the Jail, occupied by only a handful of DOC leadership, is disinfected daily by a team of workers in full protective clothing. The Director of the Jail, Quincy Booth, and his leadership staff actually do not even work at the Jail. They are at the Reeves Center in splendid isolation from the inmates, issuing directives to officers through texts and email.

DOC misleads the public in its reporting of positive cases of COVID-19 among inmates. Testing is inadequate at the D.C. Jail. Inmates are only tested when it is too late to protect other inmates, and the results take almost 6 hours. No testing is available for corrections officers. Any correction officer exposed to COVID-19 or with symptoms is sent home for 14-day self-quarantine. These officers and their family members are unable to obtain testing while on quarantine without going to a hospital with testing. More importantly, the DOC is not addressing the obvious: the rate of quarantine of corrections officers working in the Central Treatment Facility is already approximately 25% in the past 5 days and will increase significantly today after the announcement of two infected inmates in CTF. Already officers assigned to the Central Detention Facility are being re-assigned to CTF due to the number of CTF officers on quarantine. Soon the Jail will have no corrections officers.

Because COVID-19 testing in the Jail is only being used as a diagnostic tool, the rate of infection does not reflect the true level of infection at the Jail. The spread of all illnesses in a Jail population dramatically exceeds that in the general population. D.C.’s own statistics for newly infected persons show that almost a third of the 342 infected persons are in their 20s and 30s. Any expert in public health will tell you that there are untested COVID-19 infected inmates and infected corrections officers in the Jail today.

Yesterday, FOP/DOC unilaterally implemented its own Protocol for corrections officers and other members working at the Jail. In essence, because of the lack of PPE and other prophylactic cleaning measures, corrections officers will “shelter in place” in self-contained structures in the Jail called “bubbles.” Corrections officers will not leave the bubble for contact work with inmates unless provided with the appropriate PPE. This includes conducting security checks while inmates are on the floor and delivering meals to cells.

FOP/DOC recognizes this is a crisis, and it is not unfair to say that the corrections officers who continue to report to work are doing so because of our leadership. However, the first principle for addressing this crisis – as emphasized by the CDC and the Department of Homeland Security with whom we are in consultation – is COMMUNICATION.

FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE DOC LABOR COMMITTEE

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