



State of Connecticut
Department of Correction

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For immediate release
The Department of Correction continues essential operations while managing reentry planning and routine offender releases without disruption

March 24, 2020

The Department of Correction has implemented significant efforts to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in our state's correctional facilities. These measures, aimed to protect the health of our employees and the offender population, are anchored in a foundation of public health and public safety considerations.

Phase one of the agency's modified operational plans, implemented at all fourteen sites, include:

- Emphasis on continuous cleaning/disinfecting on all three shifts and issuance of additional soap
- Suspension of social visits to minimize the potential of external exposures
- Suspension of volunteer led programs
- Suspension of all community offender work crews
- Suspension of all civilian tours
- Limiting nonessential inter-facility offender transfers
- Meals conducted in the housing unit
- Recreation groups limited to one housing unit at a time

- Modified movement during medication distribution
- Implementation of COVID-19 offender intake assessment tool
- Implementation of temperature checks for all employees at each facility location and each parole office

Concurrent to these necessary restrictions, the following efforts are in place to minimize the overall impact on the population and maintain a safe environment for all:

- Two free phone calls per week
- Suspension of co-pay obligations associated with medical services
- Active religious services with minimal participants
- Laundry services – undisrupted
- Commissary delivery – undisrupted
- Medication Assisted Therapy (MAT) – undisrupted
- Professional attorney visits permitted
- Assessing overall population need based on age and medical score

Despite functioning under a modified operational plan in an effort to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the Department of Correction is continuing to release offenders back to their communities without disruption. While preparing for all contingencies related to COVID-19 and acting within statutory authority, the agency is following existing policy and release mechanisms to create additional bed space allowing more flexibility for individual facilities to manage quarantine units under public health guidance, all the while maintaining our obligations to support public safety.

The Department of Correction's Community Release Unit (CRU) and Parole and Community Services (PCS) Division and The Board of Pardons and Paroles (BOPP) are working collaboratively to review appropriate release eligible offenders that have a solid home plan. Community release decisions include a risk assessment process which evaluates the risk of the offender to the public and for recidivism. We have added a process to prioritize those that are considered high risk if exposed to COVID-19 following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines.

The number of offenders expected to be released under existing protocols allows for public health to be a priority.

Simultaneously with these efforts, the DOC Parole and Community Services Division has modified its practices in support of social distancing recommendations to protect both staff and parolees.

Preparing people for a successful return home after a period of incarceration has always come with its challenges, however releasing people during a national health crisis adds additional layers of complexities. The threat of homelessness, a reduction in available services in the community, and a lack of available employment based on COVID-19 related business closures are just some examples of challenging circumstances for release. We also cannot leave out victim impact or public safety which are other critical considerations involved in release decisions.

In keeping with our commitment to provide returning citizens with the very best chance for success, the DOC Reentry Unit is collaborating with the Hartford Reentry Center, CT Coalition to End Homelessness, and our other community partners to find alternative ways to connect people to reentry services and housing supports. DOC has also partnered with the Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy (IMRP) and the CT Reentry Collaborative to quickly create a fact sheet for all releasing offenders with information about changes to resource information that were likely triggered by COVID-19 and where to find assistance.

A review of population counts from the inception of COVID-19 in the state of Connecticut in early March to present reveals that routine release mechanisms, in support of public health and public safety, continue to reduce the offender population.

Overall population count 3/1/2020: **12, 409**

Overall population count 3/24/2020: **12, 099**

In the event the Department of Correction experiences an emergent widespread outbreak of COVID-19 and our facility pandemic plans for quarantines are

fractured, we are prepared to expand our release options with careful considerations associated with public health and public safety.

“We understand families are naturally worried. This applies both to our employees and the offender population. There is a human dignity component here. We are all living in a time of extreme uncertainty. With that being said, this is one giant balancing act and our current practice is moving the needle in the right direction. I am committed to our mission of public safety and I will also continue to safely transition offenders home. Through this all, I cannot overstate the camaraderie we have witnessed as we all pull together to get the job done. I couldn’t be more proud of the people of this department.” said Commissioner Cook.