



TEXAS HOUSE *of* REPRESENTATIVES

James White

*House District 19
Jasper, Newton, Hardin, Polk, Tyler*

CORRECTIONS
CHAIR

REDISTRICTING

JUDICIARY &
CIVIL JURISPRUDENCE

\March 25, 2020

Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) COVID-19 Mitigation Efforts

Dear Members:

As we all continue to move forward in these unprecedented times, I want to share with you the precautions the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) has made to ensure that COVID-19 does not spread through the Texas prison system. The safety of our correctional officers, medical staff, the justice-involved, and the peace of mind and safety of their families is extremely important during these tough times.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at 281-658-0540 (cell) if you have any questions or concerns.

God bless

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The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) is treating a justice-involved who has tested positive for the COVID-19 virus. The 37-year-old justice-involved is currently medically isolated and being treated at Hospital Galveston where he has been for 4 days. He came into TDCJ custody on February 27th from Harris County where he had been convicted on two drug possession charges.

In the early morning hours of March 21, 2020, the justice-involved reported he was suffering from shortness of breath and a cough while in custody at the Lychner State Jail. He was immediately evaluated in the medical facility there and transported to Memorial Hermann Hospital in Houston. After evaluation and treatment, the justice-involved was transferred to Hospital Galveston where he was tested for the COVID-19 virus. Due to the nature of his symptoms and a pre-existing respiratory condition, he was treated following the coronavirus disease 2019 infectious disease protocol. TDCJ is also following the Centers for Disease Control guidelines for management of COVID-19 in Correctional facilities.

Under those protocols medical professionals from our partners at UTMB, are taking precautions including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). The justice-involved is currently in good condition.

Other justice-involved and staff who may have had contact with the individual who has tested positive are now being medically restricted per disease protocol which includes limiting their movement.

The initial investigation suggests there are no additional symptomatic justice-involved at the Lychner State Jail. The contact investigation concerning staff is on-going.

“TDCJ is saddened to learn of this positive case in an offender but the agency is well prepared to handle this challenge,” said Bryan Collier TDCJ’s Executive Director. “Our coronavirus protocol was developed exactly for a situation like this. Our prayers are with the offender and his family as he recovers from this illness.”



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The mission of TDCJ is to provide public safety, promote positive change in offender behavior, reintegrate offenders into society, and assist the victims of crime. TDCJ will continue to meet that mission.

TDCJ continues to monitor and take necessary precautions to prevent and mitigate the spread of the coronavirus.

There has been one confirmed case involving an employee of Management and Training Corporation (MTC), who has tested positive for the COVID-19 virus. The employee is a substance abuse counselor. On March 17, 2020, he passed all unit entry screening and attended a training session with other MTC employees. He also had cell side counseling visits with a limited number of restricted housing offenders at the Jester 1 Unit in Richmond, TX.

No one in contact with the counselor are symptomatic at this time. The MTC employees who were in the training session on the 17th are not at work and are in self-quarantine. The offenders who had limited contact with the employee are all restrictive housing offenders who had limited contact through hard cell doors with the counselor. No one in contact with the counselor are symptomatic at this time. The MTC employees who were in the training session on the 17th are not at work and are in self-quarantine. The offenders who had limited contact with the employee are all restrictive housing offenders who had limited contact through hard cell doors with the counselor.

“Any offenders who had any possible contact with the counselor are being closely monitored by medical staff,” said Dr. Lannette Linthicum, TDCJ’s Health Services Director.

As TDCJ trained medical providers identifies staff or incarcerated justice-involved as COVID-19 persons under investigation (PUIs), they are tested and monitored in accordance with Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance.

As of the release of this document, TDCJ has no confirmed cases of COVID-19 among its employees (the confirmed case above involves an employee of a contractor – MTC).

Below are the precautions the agency has implemented to date.



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TRAVEL:

- ✓ Agency travel will be limited unless it is a necessity.
- ✓ Staff have been asked to limit any unnecessary domestic traveling.
- ✓ Any international travel must be approved by the deputy executive director, and if approved, the employee may be required to delay their return to work.
- ✓ Any out of state travel must be approved by the employee's division director, and if approved, the employee may be required to delay their return to work.

TELEWORK:

- ✓ The agency continues to expand telework capabilities.
- ✓ The agency is revising policies regarding administrative leave for employees for whom their inability to come to work is beyond their control.

ILLNESSES:

- ✓ Before any individual enters a secure facility, they will have their temperature taken and if a fever is present, the COVID-19 Screening must be completed. As thermometers become available, screenings are being implemented at other locations. Due to the high volume, we have had some instances of equipment failure, but departments are looking locally for additional supplies and additional equipment has been ordered.
- ✓ Individuals with fever are being sent home and required to submit a physician's note stating they are clear of any symptoms of COVID-19 before being allowed to return to work.
- ✓ If an individual has been in contact with anyone who tested positive for COVID-19, they will be sent home and not allowed to return to work without providing a physician's note stating they are clear of any COVID-19 symptoms.
- ✓ Divisions that do not currently have temperature monitoring equipment have been provided instructions to conduct the COVID-19 screening on employees who notify supervisors that they are feeling ill. Additional temperature monitoring equipment has been ordered.
- ✓ In an effort to increase awareness, posters have been printed instructing staff to contact their supervisor if feeling ill.
- ✓ An employee hotline has been established for questions and concerns.

VISITORS AND OFFENDER FAMILIES:



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- ✓ In accordance with Governor Abbott's declaration, effective March 13, 2020, the TDCJ temporarily suspended offender visitation at all facilities (statewide) until further notice.
- ✓ The agency is limiting all visitors to units to include volunteer assemblies, routine audits, vendors, outside contractors, tours, and training sessions.
- ✓ The Office of the Ombudsman has opened a family hotline.
- ✓ Conference calls with family groups are being conducted.
- ✓ The agency has expanded access to the Offender Telephone System to additional offenders and lifted any imposed suspensions.
- ✓ Offender Telephone System hours have been expanded.
- ✓ The vendors for the Offender Telephone System are providing two free 15 minute phone calls per week, per offender, effective March 24, 2020.
- ✓ Vendors are discounting fees for electronic messages. Customers who have purchased 10 or more electronic stamps in the last 30 days will receive two free stamps. Customers who use 10 or more stamps weekly will continue to receive 2 free stamps weekly. Additionally, the cost of stamps will be reduced based on the number purchased.

MEDICAL ACCESS / DISEASE PREVENTION:

- ✓ Offender medical fees (co-pays) are being waived.
- ✓ The agency has a confirmed supply of personal protective equipment and has made arrangements to receive additional protective equipment as needed.
- ✓ As a precaution in the event that those supplies are exhausted, Texas Correctional Industries has begun making cloth masks. They are also exploring what additional PPE would be possible to manufacture.
- ✓ Protective equipment will be prioritized according to the number of cases in the county in which they are located.
- ✓ The TDCJ has protocols in place to prevent the spread of all infectious disease.
- ✓ A plan has been developed to isolate offenders with confirmed cases in the event this occurs.
- ✓ Texas Correctional Industries is making additional beach to be distributed to all locations.
- ✓ The agency is receiving and distributing additional hand sanitizer.



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- ✓ Unit administrators system-wide have implemented plans to minimize offender proximity to one another and to staff to the extent possible, and to limit internal movement.
- ✓ The Manufacturing, Agribusiness and Logistics Division is distributing personal protective equipment to include masks, face shields / goggles, gowns, and gloves to be available for staff in the event an offender who has tested positive is transported or is placed in isolated housing.

SANITATION:

- ✓ Staff have been reminded to take proper housekeeping/cleaning steps both in their personal office space as well as their total work environments.
- ✓ Staff have been asked to use good hygiene practices, frequently wash hands thoroughly, and refrain from touching their eyes, nose, and mouth.
- ✓ All areas of the units are being cleaned regularly using a 10% bleach solution.

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ The agency has increased the supply of food and fuel on hand.

GATHERINGS:

- ✓ Meetings or gatherings are being cancelled or conducted through teleconference.
- ✓ In Service and other routine training has been postponed.
- ✓ Pre-service training is being conducted but modified to class sizes of 10 or less.
- ✓ The agency is advancing its capabilities for online training and webinars.

INTAKE:

- ✓ Most justice-involved entering the TDCJ will have been in a county facility ample time for symptoms to become visible.
- ✓ The justice-involved are screened upon intake for fever and symptoms associated with COVID-19.
- ✓ Justice-involved with symptoms will be isolated and seen by a physician.
- ✓ Posters and videos advising the justice-involved of proper sanitation procedures and prevention measures are being distributed to all units.
- ✓ The TDCJ is working with the Texas Commission on Jail Standards to ensure communication if there is a positive test at the local jail level.



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JUSTICE-INVOLVED PROGRAMMING:

- ✓ Pursuant to direction from the Texas Education Agency, the Windham School District has closed campuses on TDCJ facilities. Teachers are providing assignments and working with the wardens to distribute supplies so there is no interruption in offender pre-release programming.
- ✓ Other programming staff continue to provide services to justice-involved, and chaplaincy staff are available for those in need of guidance.

JUSTICE-INVOLVED RELEASING:

- ✓ TDCJ Reentry and Integration staff are monitoring bus routes to ensure offenders releasing will be able to return to their residences safely.

PAROLEES:

- ✓ Client and employee temperature screening procedures have been implemented at parole offices.
- ✓ Visitation has been suspended at Residential Reentry Centers and Transitional Treatment Centers.
- ✓ Parole officers are practicing social distancing when making home visits.
- ✓ For parolees required to take treatment classes in the community, the agency is modifying those class sizes. Events in which there would typically be a larger group of clients is being modified, such as new client orientation.
- ✓ Pursuant to shelter in place orders from various cities and counties, district parole offices in those areas will minimize office visits. Parole officers will continue telephonic contacts for low level parolees and will conduct field visits for moderate and high risk parolees. These procedures will be implemented in other locations as additional counties issue shelter in place orders.

EMPLOYEES:

- ✓ For locations that have shelter in place orders, essential personnel are continuing to perform their core functions, some in office and some through telework. Non-essential personnel are approved for administrative leave.

Of course, this COVID-19 attack on Texas is an a dynamic event. TDCJ has a to enhance public safety by maintaining safe and secure facilities for staff and the justice-involved, rehabilitating the incarcerated population, and reintegrate the formerly incarcerated into free



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society as productive Texans. As COVID-19 evolves, TDCJ has a constitutional mandate to ensure the health and safety of its employees and the incarcerated justice-involved in its custody.

The agency will continue monitoring the situation for as long as necessary and remains in continuous communication with the Centers for Disease Control, the Texas Division of Emergency Management, the Texas Department of State Health Services, and its university healthcare providers to monitor developments associated with the spread of COVID-19.

