



SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT, COUNTY OF NASSAU

Sheriff's Memo

TO: ALL CONCERNED PARTIES
FROM: JAMES E. DZURENDA, SHERIFF
DATE: MARCH 03, 2021
SUBJECT: COVID-19 NYS REOPENING

As COVID positive numbers continue to decline in the County, they are not gone. There still is an infection rate, and any number of positive COVID is a concern. In a correctional setting, a significant percentage of the inmate population are often identified as high risk, based upon the medical history and age, especially the elderly that are incarcerated. Also, not to mention, the limited ability to social distance, which has been a proven factor issued by the CDC in helping to reduce the possibility of contracting the virus.

The Facility is still testing every inmate who enters the facility upon admission, as well as, any inmate who displays any sign or symptom at any point. When outside visitors, volunteers and staff enter the facility from the community, it increases the potential for the spread of the virus. As I cannot restrict staff from entering the facility, I can restrict visitors and volunteers in an effort to minimize the COVID-19 spread. However, it is important that staff continue to wear masks when they cannot social distance, as well as, each inmate incarcerated.

The question will continue to arise when it will be safe to open the opportunity for visitors and volunteers to come back into the facility. As we know, there is no perfect way to make this decision or any specific evidence based method to arrive at such. I can only make a decision based on what I believe best protects staff, inmates, and the public.

Besides our own facility infection rate, another factor that has to be taken into consideration is when the New York State opens up the process to start accepting State Ready Inmates who have been sentenced to do their incarceration in the NYS DOCS. Currently, we have a significant number of inmates that are being held at the Nassau County Correctional Center who should be doing their sentences in the NYS State Prison system, where they would be able to begin working on their required programs, job training, and community re-entry plans. The pandemic has caused NYS to cease transferring inmates into their prisons for some time now. These imposed restrictions could delay their progress of preparing for community re-entry, which needs to start on their first day processed into the NYS State Correctional Center.

That being said, the State will not accept a transfer to their Department if there are any positive COVID inmates in the Facility 10 days prior to the transfer. I also have to take this into consideration before making the determination to open up visiting and volunteers. I do not want to delay the transfer process, nor do I want any inmate being targeted by violence against them if they are identified as the reason for inmates not being transferred to the NYS DOCS. As I mentioned, opening up visiting and volunteers increases that risk of COVID-19 being introduced and spread to the inmate population.

I thought it was important for me to explain this difficult decision I will need to make, as to allow or continue to not allow visiting and volunteers. The Governor and the State prisons are expected to announce reopening protocols in the weeks ahead. I know how important these matters are to the inmate population and to all of us, as a means for corrective and support programs and services to resume, in order to reduce victimization both inside this facility and in each of our home communities.

James E. Dzurenda, Sheriff