

DATE: Wednesday, October 21, 2020

TO: Committee on Judiciary, Safety and General Services

FROM: Theodore Chisholm, Chief of Staff, Office of the Sheriff  
Inspector Aaron Dobson, Jail Commander, Office of the Sheriff

CC: George Christenson, County Clerk, Office of the Clerk  
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Board of Supervisors  
Steve Cady, Director of Research and Policy, Office of the Comptroller

**RE: Report from the Office of the Sheriff Regarding the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency**

The Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors has requested “a written informational report from the Sheriff, Office of the Sheriff, regarding the response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) public health emergency, and updates on confirmed employee and inmate cases at the Milwaukee County Jail.” In response to this request, we have prepared the following summary report detailing current statistics as well as ongoing actions by the Milwaukee County Sheriff’s Office in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

### **Summary of Strategic Responses to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency**

In the first quarter of 2020, the Milwaukee County Sheriff’s Office (MCSO) assessed that the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan, China, exhibited the potential to spread to the United States and impact community health in Milwaukee County. As the outbreak expanded and spread to coastal regions of the United States, MCSO developed internal continuity-of-operations contingencies and worked with public health and emergency management authorities to prepare for the virus’ arrival in Milwaukee County in mid-March. From mid-March to the present, MCSO has, in close consultation with public health authorities, implemented highly-adaptive strategies to protect MCSO personnel and individuals in MCSO custody from exposure to COVID-19; to identify positive cases and mitigate their impact on agency operations; and to anticipate new COVID-19-related challenges based on emerging data trends.

To maximize physical distancing within the Milwaukee County Jail, MCSO has, beginning in March, closed intake to misdemeanor arrestees other than in cases of domestic violence and certain instances of operating while intoxicated. Additionally, early in the pandemic, MCSO collaborated with criminal justice system stakeholders to facilitate the reduction of the jail population through judicially authorized releases. As a result, MCSO has achieved reductions in the jail population resulting in a relatively constant population of 650-675 persons in custody, enabling single-cell housing in accordance with public health recommendations. Additionally, MCSO has coordinated with the Milwaukee County House of Correction and the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility to maximize available space at the House of Correction for two purposes: safely and humanely isolating individuals in custody who test positive for COVID-19, and, in entirely separate housing at the House of Correction, housing individuals who test negative for COVID-19 after initial booking at the downtown jail. Within the jail, MCSO and the agency’s medical provider, Wellpath LP, have established quarantine and isolation space, implemented universal testing upon intake, coordinated with the State of Wisconsin and the Milwaukee Health Department to secure appropriate rapid and nasopharyngeal testing supplies, and utilized tiered housing strategies to house recently-arrived persons in custody separately from individuals in longer-term housing.

MCSO strictly enforces public health measures, including mask-wearing, within the agency (violations of the Milwaukee County mask-wearing policy witnessed by agency supervisors must be immediately reported to the Internal Affairs Division) and ensures that all persons in custody receive new surgical masks upon intake, upon request, and at least once per day while in agency custody. MCSO has developed an internal logistics and procurement organization, the Logistics and Procurement Team, which works with the Countywide Procurement Team and with approved County vendors to ensure an ample supply of advanced protective equipment for the agency.

**Summary of Current Statistics Related to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency**

As of Wednesday, October 21, the following statistics are accurate within the Milwaukee County Jail:

Population

CJF 653

COVID-19: Staff Members

COVID-19 Positive 6

Out of Work – Symptomatic 5

COVID-19: Persons in Custody

COVID-19 Positive 3\*

Quarantined (Symptoms or Direct Exposure) 8

\*one individual will be released by the end of the day on Wednesday, October 21