



**SHERIFF EARNELL R. LUCAS**

**REVISED JULY 11, 2022**

**DATE:** July 11, 2022

**TO:** Marcelia Nicholson, Chair, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Chief Deputy Denita Ball, Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office

**RE:** County Board Transition Informational Report Regarding the Roles and Responsibilities of the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office

**File Type:** Informational Report

**BACKGROUND**

Chairwoman Nicholson requested an overview of the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) to assist the newly elected County Board Supervisors with their term transition.

This report and corresponding PowerPoint will provide information regarding MCSO's leadership, mission, vision, divisional information, staffing challenges, staffing and occupant demographics and COVID-19 mitigation.

**MISSION/VISION**

- To restore honor, integrity and trust to MCSO.
- To operate a safe and humane agency where citizens, staff and occupants are treated with dignity and respect.
- Ensure accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness in law enforcement operations.

**OVERVIEW**

The Office of the Sheriff is created by the Wisconsin Constitution (Article VI, Section 4). It is an elected office with a four-year term. Consequently, the Sheriff is a constitutional officer who is the Chief Law Enforcement Officer of Milwaukee County. The Sheriff's duties are varied and unique and, for the most part, are defined in the Wisconsin Statutes. They include but are not limited to enforcing state law and county ordinances, maintaining the peace, running the jail, serving and executing criminal and civil process, writs, precepts and legal orders, and

overseeing the safety and security of the courts. In addition, MCSO provides law enforcement services for the Milwaukee Mitchell International Airport and Milwaukee County institutions, patrols the freeways and parks, and operates a CART Team and other specialty units that support the agency and the community.

## **LEADERSHIP**

The Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office leadership consists of Sheriff Earnell R. Lucas, Chief Deputy Denita Ball, Chief Legal and Compliance Officer Molly Zillig, acting Chief of Staff James Burnett, and three inspectors, Brian Barkow, Aaron Dobson and Daniel Hughes.

## **BUDGET**

MCSO has a 2022 budget that includes \$48.8 million in expenditures, \$12.4 million in revenue, and a total tax levy of \$36.4 million. In addition, MSCO oversees a \$2.8 million occupant transport contract for both the Milwaukee County Jail and the Milwaukee County House of Correction.

## **STAFFING**

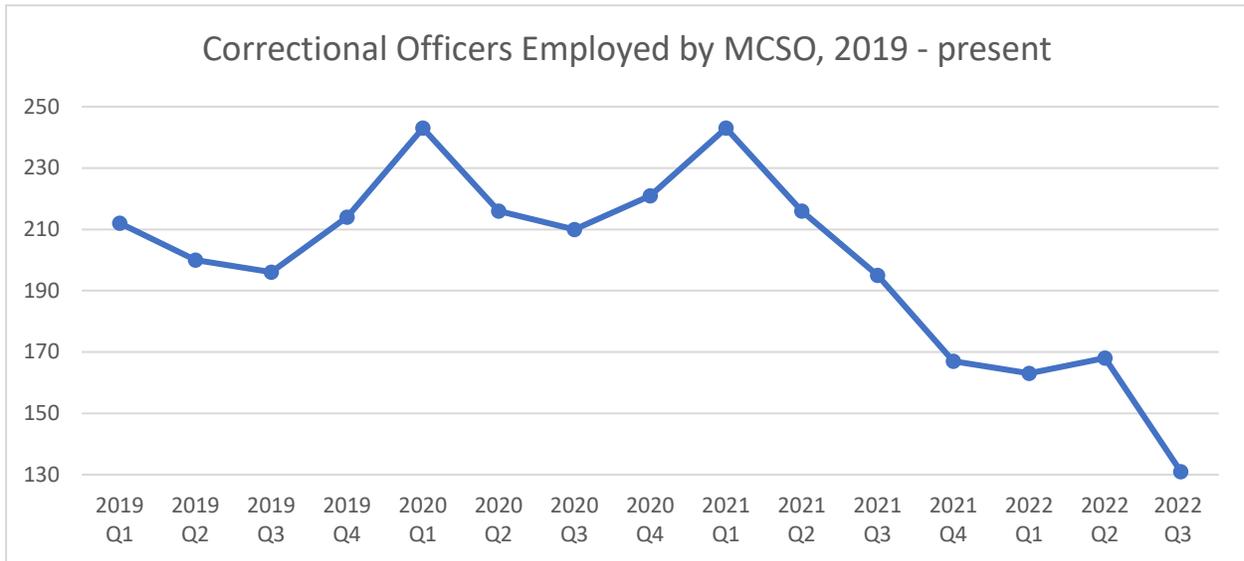
“Critical” is the only way to describe MCSO’s low staffing level in the jail. Currently, there are 131 correctional officer positions filled, with 120 vacant. With 251 correctional officer positions budgeted, we have almost a 50% vacancy rate in the jail with a daily occupant capacity of 960, a limit set by court order in 2007 pursuant to the *Christensen Consent Decree*. For the last 2 months, the jail has consistently averaged over 920 occupants on a daily basis. The numbers have continued to increase and we have no reason to believe this will change with current crime trends. Among the reasons for the high vacancy rate in the correctional officer classification is a competitive job market, low starting wage compared to surrounding counties, no budgeted funds for step increases within the pay range over the last 12 years, a very significant overtime burden and very difficult job duties.

In 2021, then Supervisor Russell Goodwin sponsored a resolution that sought to reallocate the correctional officer pay range, which would have provided for a starting hourly wage of \$29.43 per hour to align with the starting hourly pay for Racine County Correctional Officers. At that time, the starting hourly wage was \$20.59 per hour. That resolution did not pass; rather, the County Board passed a resolution that gave officers a \$3.00 “per hour worked” premium payment for fully vaccinated officers. This premium payment was financed with ARPA funding and will expire in 2025 unless the County Board works out a financial solution to allow the increase to remain permanent. Although the MCSO appreciates the premium pay allotted, the \$3.00 hourly increase has not proven to be enough of an increase to fill these “difficult-to-fill” positions as evidenced by our continued and sustained vacancy rate. In addition, since it is a temporary increase, many applicants have voiced concern with the longevity of the “premium pay” and the fact that it may not be a permanent. Meaning correctional officers wages could go down in the very near future.

High position turnover and vacancies result in mandatory overtime in a jail that must operate on a 24/7 basis, serving all 19 municipalities that make up Milwaukee County. As a result, many of our officers work multiple 12-hour shifts per week to keep up with our staffing needs

instead of the usual 8-hour shift. In addition, MCSO is assigning deputy sheriffs to the jail to provide relief and additional backup. However, all that does is deplete the number of deputies assigned to other divisions within the MCSO. Currently, we have 283 budgeted Deputy Sheriff positions, with 258 filled and 25 vacant.

The following chart displays the quarterly staffing trend for correctional officers from 2019 to the present.

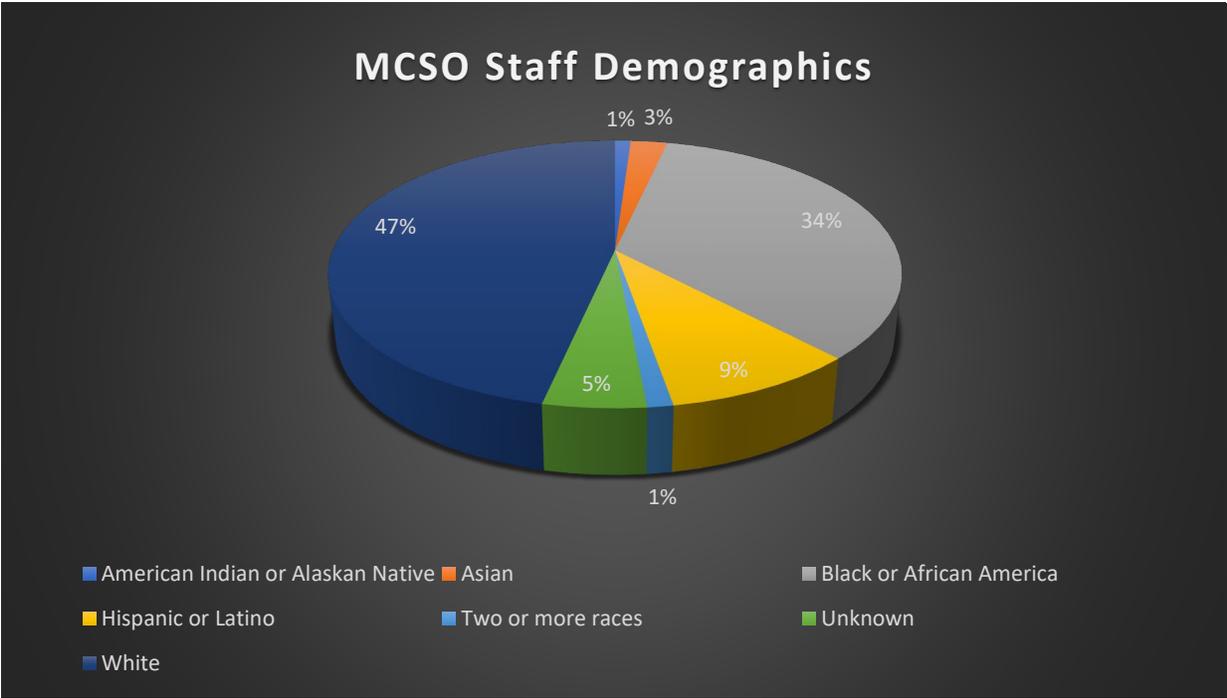


### **MCSO STAFF DEMOGRAPHICS**

The following chart shows the demographics for MCSO’s staff.

American Indian or Alaska Native	1%
Asian	3%
Black or African American	34%
Hispanic or Latino	9%
Two or more races	1%
Unknown	5%
White	47%

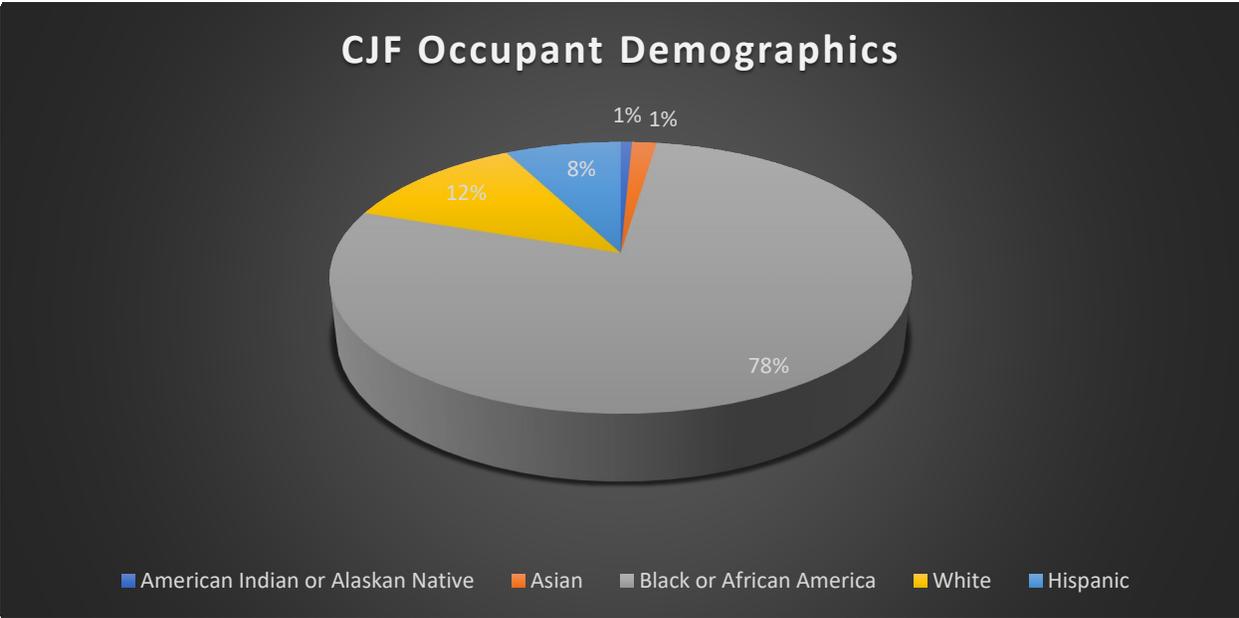
Female	36%
Male	64%



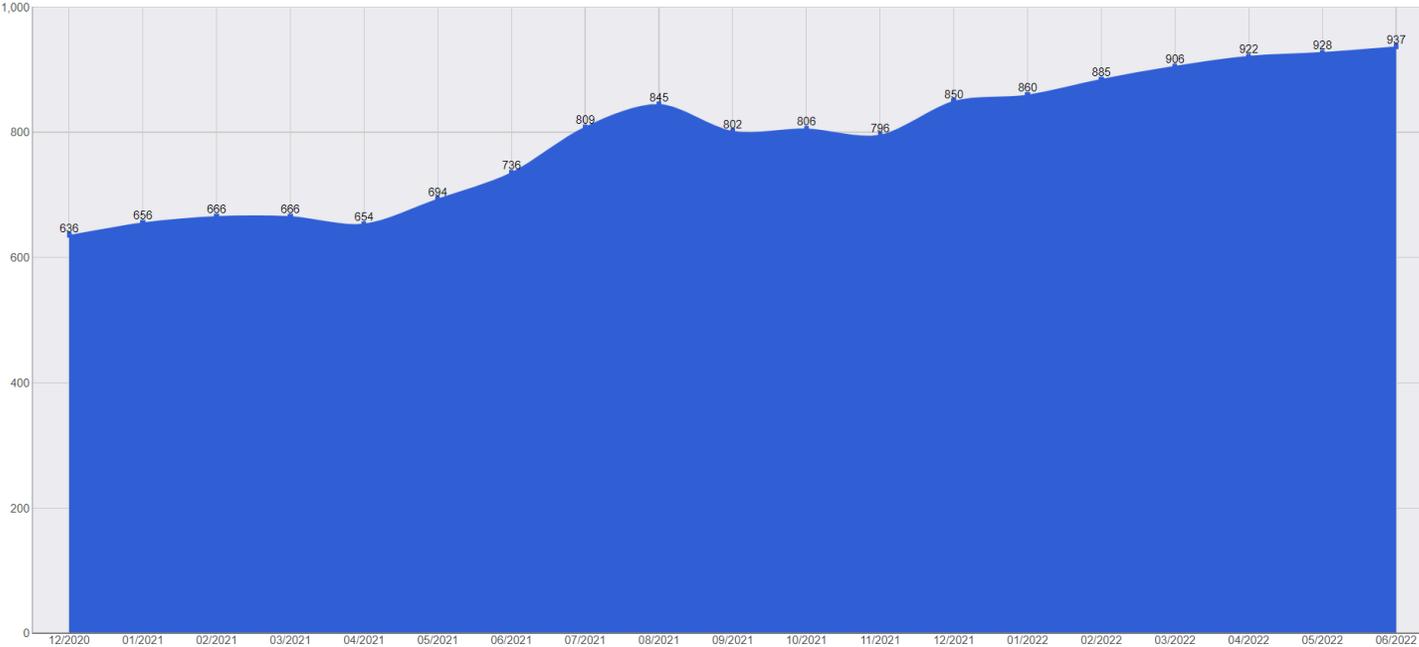
**CJF OCCUPANT DEMOGRAPHICS**

The following chart shows the demographics for the Milwaukee County Jail occupants (current population of 951 as of 06/24/22):

American Indian/Alaskan Native	1%
Asian	1%
Black or African American	78%
White	12%
Hispanic	8%
Female	9%
Male	91%



The following chart displays the past 18-month population trend in the Milwaukee County Jail.

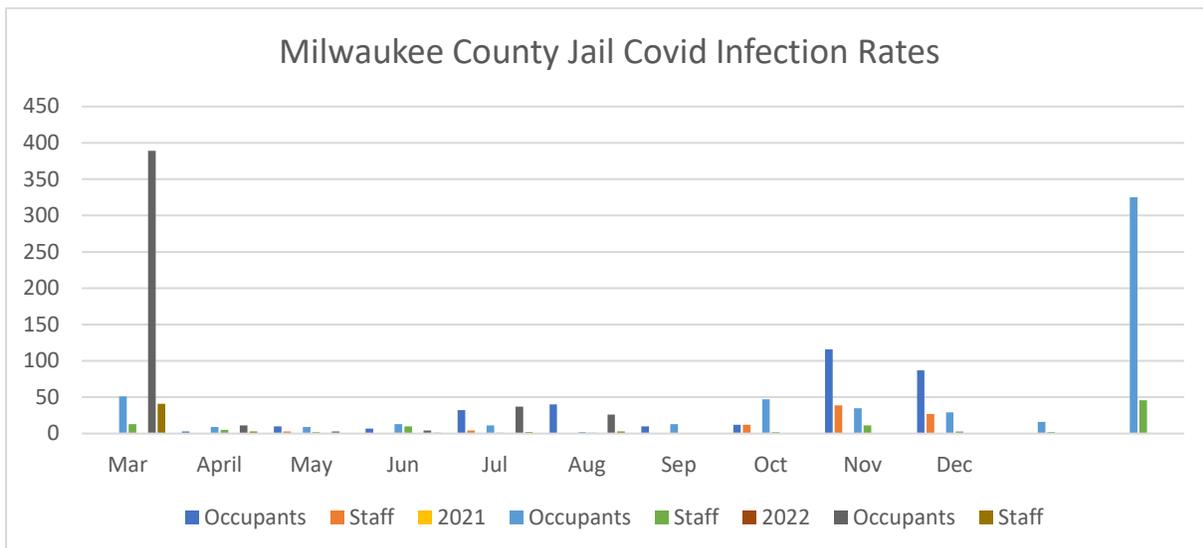


## COVID-19

As of June 24, 2022, no Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office members were COVID-positive, and just five occupants of the 951 at the Milwaukee County Jail were COVID-positive.

The MCJ has experienced three COVID-19 surges since March 2020 – in November 2020, when 116 occupants and 39 staff were infected, December 2021 (325/46), and January 2022 (389/41). During the highest surge in January, the weekly occupant population averaged 938.25.

This graph demonstrates the fluctuation of COVID-19 rates among occupants of the MCJ month-to-month, from March 2020 to date:



To combat COVID-19 and ensure the safest setting for our staff and occupants, dating back to the start of the pandemic, MCSO has maintained the following mitigation protocols when occupants have tested positive:

- Placed patients in a Special Medical Unit (when population levels, which consistently hover near our maximum capacity of 960, allow space for such a unit) or single-cell isolation for up to 14 days, in keeping with current CDC recommendations
- Ensured that anyone entering a patient's cell wears an N-95 mask and ensured that all staff and occupants have access to CDC recommended masks
- Contacted the Milwaukee County Health Department promptly upon every case of suspected infection to inform the Communicable Disease Department that we are investigating a possible case of COVID-19 infection
- Ensured that Wellpath has medically cleared all occupants via COVID-19 PCR testing prior to authorizing their return to general or more open, interactive housing units
- Restricted occupant visitation to non-contact sight visits, including visitation booths and video calling stations

Further, as a matter of mitigation, the MCJ began and maintains daily structural cleaning and

hygienic protocols that include:

- The deployment of UV-C robots for surface disinfection
- The twice-daily cleaning and disinfecting of all housing units by pod workers – essentially all areas accessible to human touch
- The daily cleaning and disinfecting of all MCJ common areas
- All staff and occupants being compelled to handwash regularly, with soap, for 20-plus seconds
- All staff wearing sturdy surgical-style gloves, especially for physical contact with occupants
- All staff wiping down work surfaces with sanitizing wipes after each use
- All staff always wearing masks and all occupants wearing masks when outside of their cells in common spaces

While cleaning and disinfection protocols have been critical to the MCJ's efforts to maintain a safe and healthy environment during the COVID-19 pandemic, equally critical have been our vaccination efforts.

The MCJ require staff to be vaccinated, barring verified medical or religious exemptions. Upon booking, occupants are briefed by officers and medical staff about vaccine options, how vaccines are administered, their benefits, potential side effects, and the role they play in preventing infection and the spread of COVID-19.

As of June 23, 2022, 35 percent of occupants were vaccinated. This rate can fluctuate daily, considering that as the MCJ is a pretrial detention facility, occupants are sometimes in our care for just days.

Keeping in mind the transient nature of our occupant population, MCJ staff and Wellpath medical workers frequently battle the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories that cast doubt on the efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines and suspicion on their impetus.

Among other efforts to dispute misinformation and encourage occupant vaccination, in partnership with the Milwaukee County House of Correction, the MCJ has hosted a Milwaukee-based engagement firm, whose staff of community influencers include a registered nurse. This group has conducted regular, COVID-19 vaccine informational and Q&A sessions with occupants.

The MCJ's most effective tool for inspiring vaccination among occupants has been the \$50 payment –authorized by County Board Resolution 21-632– to occupants who are vaccinated while in custody. To be clear, this means \$50 each for initial vaccine injections, secondary shots, and third booster shots.

The COVID-19 pandemic took a serious toll on what were already thinning officer ranks at the MCJ, which have not recovered and are now at critically low levels. The MCSO Public Affairs & Community Engagement team in collaboration with Milwaukee County Human Resources has ramped up officer recruitment efforts in the first two quarters of 2022.

Cc: County Executive David Crowley  
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office  
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board  
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