



MEMO TO: Whatcom County Council

FROM: Satpal Singh Sidhu, County Executive
Bill Elfo, Sheriff
Eric Richey, Prosecuting Attorney
Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

DATE: May 21, 2020

RE: COVID-19 Public Health Precautions – Correctional Facilities

Public health, corrections and inmate advocacy groups have raised serious and credible issues relating to the spread of COVID-19 within correctional facilities. Last week, a corrections officer in Snohomish County contracted the COVID virus from an inmate and died. Over twenty years of consultant reports highlight the inadequacy of our jail facilities to include the infrastructure needed to control infectious disease.

This letter is jointly written by the Executive, Sheriff, Prosecuting Attorney and Council Chair to show the importance of County leadership coming together to take the necessary steps to protect staff and those incarcerated during these times of COVID-19. In consultation this group agrees that the Executive should utilize a portion of the CARES Act funds to analyze the correctional facilities to develop a plan to respond to the “new normal” by providing the proper public health precautions to in those facilities.

Limitations on community engagement and fiscal concerns brought on by the pandemic made it impractical to continue the process of long-term correctional facility visioning and planning. Nonetheless, Whatcom County has an acute need to rapidly develop a plan to identify options for modifications within existing jail facilities for infectious disease screening and treatment to include the capacity for distancing inmates, maintaining isolation/quarantine capabilities, including negative pressure cells, as well as provide infrastructure for staff and inmates to meet hygiene recommendations.

We are proactively discussing with HOK to develop a new contract for less than \$40,000 with HOK, who is familiar with our facilities, to identify options for:

- Medical space for the effective and safe screening for, and the treatment of COVID-19 related illnesses to include isolation, quarantine and negative pressure housing;

- Safe housing of inmates according to security and medical classification while maintaining distancing requirements and provide the accommodations needed to meet recommended hygiene standards;
- Provide space and infrastructure for safe programming opportunities (GED, life skills, religious, etc.)
- Provide space and infrastructure for safe meetings with attorneys, social workers, etc.;
- Provide infrastructure for improved air circulation, ventilation and other means of controlling airborne disease.

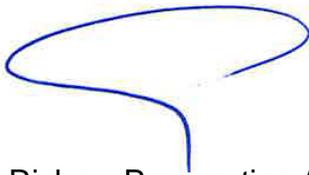
This may include an evaluation of methods for reducing the population in the downtown jail and increasing capabilities at the jail work center. It may also include a study of the suitability of using the space currently allotted to the existing Behavioral Health Triage Center and the County Facilities Department for housing, specialized medical housing, programming and other needs.

Further evaluation from the Executive's Office will assess whether current state and federal funding sources related to COVID-19 can be used to facilitate the planning process and implement recommendations. Even if implementation funding is not available at this time, the County should have a plan should eligibility for shovel ready projects become available after the first of the year.

Sincerely,



Satpal Sidhu, County Executive



Eric Richey, Prosecuting Attorney



Bill Elfo, County Sheriff



Barry Buchanan, Council Chair