

Hi all-

Happy Monday! Lots going on, so we'll get right to it:

Rule Exceptions: On Friday, March 13, Governor Little issued an Emergency Declaration related to COVID-19. Last week, agencies were asked to submit ideas for temporary exceptions to administrative rules for the specific purpose of responding to the COVID-19 emergency. Today, Governor Little announced approval of 125 specific exceptions. IDOC requested and received two exceptions. We requested an exception to IDAPA rules that govern supervision of people in the community. Specifically, we received a temporary exception to the Idaho Response Matrix and also received an exception to the timeframes for conducting certain assessments. Chief Underwood will provide additional guidance as needed.

We also requested and received a temporary exception to certain rules requiring POST certification. In the event of significant staffing shortages, IDOC now has the ability to hire or rehire staff and place them in service before completing POST.

Thanks, IT! As this health crisis has led to minimizing in person contact, IT has been working around the clock to provide technological solutions for a new way of doing business. From equipment and licenses to support telecommuting to working at warp speed to facilitate automation and new ways to communicate. Our hardworking IT staff have been moving mountains in record time to make it happen. Thank you!

Telephonic Hearings: One of the many challenges of this health crisis is finding that balance so the work of this agency can continue while minimizing risk of exposure. One solution to minimizing transports is supporting telephonic hearings for Rider reviews at our facilities. By April 1st, all Rider reviews will be done by telephonic hearing. This is no small undertaking, and it's taken a concerted effort by facility staff, IT, the courts and others. This is a change in our normal operating practices that will facilitate release decisions and significantly reduce transports to and from counties specifically for these hearings.

Special Housing: Prisons have been working hard to proactively address the threat COVID-19 poses to the vulnerable, at-risk populations in our custody. In response, facilities have approved a layered approach to provide additional protections by setting up special housing units for people in our custody who are considered at risk of having serious health problems should they contract the virus. Access to these units is strictly limited, and the men and women who live in them are being closely monitored.

Preparedness: This isn't really out of the ordinary, but I wanted to share because it isn't something always at the forefront of the story being told about our agency. We feed a lot of people every day, and our foodservice managers, supervisors and officers do an amazing job. In times of emergencies, food can be a significant flashpoint in our facilities. Today, all IDOC facilities have 2-week supply of food. While we don't anticipate any supply chain issue, we also ordered an additional 10 day supply of non-perishable food. On top of food, we also ordered enough containers and utensils to feed every person in our custody on their units for two full weeks. Just not something most people think about when they're watching "Locked Up" on their couch. . .

"Soft" School Closures: Today, the State Board of Education directed all Idaho school districts and charter schools to implement "soft" school closures through April 20, 2020. The soft closure means the schools will be closed but allows the schools to provide meals and childcare. It also allows them to facilitate online and distance learning.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: this is going to be a marathon. Please take care of yourself and take care of each other!

Thanks-
Josh