

COVID-19 Update - April 21, 2020

Hi all-

Long day today, and an even longer email tonight! Apologies for the length, but there's a lot of ground to cover. Buckle up.

At the close of business today, Idaho reported 30 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 bringing the statewide total to 1,677. 51 deaths have been attributed to CoronaVirus-related complications. For our system, we've tested 27 people in custody. All 27 have been negative. 6 people in custody have been tested at Eagle Pass, TX, and all 6 have been negative.

**Staff COVID-19 Testing:** Late last night, we received word a staff member at ISCI tested positive for COVID-19. The staff member last worked on 4/16. As a precaution, two additional staff members have been notified of potential exposure and have been directed to self-isolate for 14 days to watch for symptoms. The staff member who tested positive is in good spirits and recovering well.

This is another example of how important it is to be mindful of how you're feeling and the need to take precautions in case you're sick. This staff member did just that, and in so doing, significantly limited potential exposure to others. Our thoughts are with our staff member for a speedy and full recovery.

To date, we are aware of 46 staff members that have been tested for COVID-19. 42 have tested negative, 1 test is pending, and 3 have tested positive.

**Budget and CEC Update:** The state budget picture continues to look bleak, which is to be expected. While we still don't yet know the full impact the public health crisis will have on the economy and tax revenues, we are preparing for the worst. As I announced earlier, the Governor directed all state agencies to revert 1% of their General Fund budget for the current year. For us, that equates to roughly \$2.6 million. We're working to identify money to be reverted. Right now, the bulk of the reversion is slated to come from fund shifts from General Fund to dedicated funds and General Fund contract savings.

We also received guidance on CEC (Change in Employee Compensation). This past session, the Governor recommended and the legislature appropriated a 2% increase for state employees. The legislature also appropriated an additional 2% for some historically hard to retain positions. The CEC also included a payline shift, which essentially means the minimum for each job classification was raised 3%. That move only affects staff who would be below the new minimum once the payline is adjusted.

The guidance we received allows the payline shift to move forward, which impacts 4 staff at IDOC. The remainder of the CEC plan has been put on hold indefinitely until the overall budget picture is better understood. It hasn't been withdrawn or cancelled at this point, but it has been delayed. Undoubtedly, that's disappointing news but it's also to be somewhat expected given the current state of affairs.

To put the economy in context, the Idaho Department of Labor announced last week that Idahoans filed more initial claims for unemployment benefits in the four weeks since the state of emergency was declared – 95,961 – than the total filed during **all of 2019 by 60 percent**. Think about that for a second. Almost 100,000 new unemployment claims were filed in four weeks. Here's the other piece worth noting about unemployment claims filed – less than a small handful were people who work for or

used to work for IDOC, and of those, a couple were extremely unusual or unfortunate circumstances. Taxpayers – ourselves included – pay the bulk of our bills, and they are hurting right now. So while there's security in working for the state, there also is a responsibility to be as efficient and effective as possible with limited taxpayer resources.

The other piece of the budget picture that is yet to be determined is how federal stimulus dollars will impact the state budget. Idaho received \$1.25 billion in COVID-19 related funding. A portion of that has been directed to local governments. The remainder will be used to cover direct costs related to the COVID response with another portion set aside for strategic investments. IDOC is well-positioned to make use of those dollars. There also is talk about Congress passing another stimulus package upon their return in May that would be targeted towards making up for lost tax revenue among other things. It's important to understand there are a lot of factors at play, and until more information is known, we just won't have a clear picture of the state budget situation.

Here's what I know for sure – we're going to be okay. Because of what we've learned about ourselves over the past month and a half, and the innovation and determination with which all of you have approached the work during an unprecedented time, we're going to be better positioned than most to weather tough times. Our approach to this crisis wasn't an accident. We were intentional about identifying the services that are essential, we were creative in figuring out how to deliver those services in a new operating environment, and we were strategic about where we deployed resources to better facilitate a new way of doing business. That approach isn't going to change when the pressures associated with COVID-19 have subsided.

What also won't change is an appreciation for what makes or breaks this outfit – you! What you do matters, and so do you. It matters to us that you have what you need to be successful in your job, find meaning and purpose in your work, and ultimately, find fulfillment in your part – wherever in the agency it might be – in making Idaho safer.

Please stay safe, take care of yourself, and keep looking out for each other!

Thanks-  
Josh