

Happy New Year!

Hi All-

It's that time of year again when we find ourselves reflecting on the year that's about to come to a close. Admittedly, it's been a tough year for a lot of us personally, and at the same time, we've managed to accomplish some pretty amazing things. This is going to be a long email, but I hope you stick with me.

COVID-19 continued to dominate our lives and the way we have to approach our work. We conducted more than 33,000 COVID-19 tests this year. And when I say "we," I mean YOU. Under the guidance of testing coordinator, Cheryl Iseri, staff from all over the agency volunteered to help conduct testing at various facilities, the point of entry, and weekly at the RDU. Special thanks to Cheryl, Kim, Brenda, and the many others who took time out of their days to help keep our facilities safe.

On the personal front, I've been pretty open about how COVID-19 touched the Tewalt household and loss of my dad. I know many of you have similar stories. My heart breaks for those of you who have experienced the worst that COVID-19 has to offer.

Combining COVID-19 with an **unprecedented staffing crisis** has caused all sorts of challenges. It's meant facility staff have had to work long hours to keep the facilities functioning properly, and to facilitate the rehabilitative activities that are critical to residents' future success. It's meant that some of you have missed important moments at home in service of our agency. We've also had staff from Probation & Parole and from non-security positions volunteer to fill positions. We thank each of you for stepping up in these important ways.

We've also lost several staff to unexpected deaths this year, leaving us wrestling with more questions than answers and feeling the punch to the heart of losses that came way too soon.

So, we've all been through a lot this year. A ton, in fact. And, somehow, our agency has pulled through. Why? Because that is who we are. I've said it before, and I'll say it again, when times are tough, **IDOC staff show up!** We shine during the tough stuff and it's what makes me so proud to be part of this agency every single day. When you're grinding it out in the prisons or in the community each day, you may not see some of the big things that have happened, so here are just a few highlights from the year:

1. We **raised security staffing starting pay** by \$2.25/hour and addressed compression through all security ranks. This 13% increase happened outside of a legislative session, in a historic show of support from the Governor's office and the legislature. And there's more to come soon!
2. We **revamped the entire leadership training series** to ensure the skills being taught support your professional development and the direction we're headed as an agency.
3. We **digitized close to 7M client records** and continue to work our way through converting more paper processes to electronic.
4. We rolled out **Connection & Intervention Stations** statewide to foster success for people on supervision.
5. We've stood up three recruiting and retention task forces to address the staffing crisis. That has translated to **89 new officers hired** in a short amount of time. And that work will continue to yield dividends in the weeks and months to come!

I could go on and on... you have done so much in spite of COVID and our staffing challenges. Just imagine what we can accomplish when those two factors become less of an issue.

Looking ahead to 2022, I'm filled with excitement about the unique opportunities that we are likely to have. As I mentioned on our last Lunch with Leadership, our budget request for this year includes several infrastructure projects that would help us add bed capacity and upgrade old housing units. It also includes an historic investment in staff, recalibrates how we staff community supervision, and includes a host of other investments to help all of you as you work to make Idaho safer. Once the Governor releases his executive budget on January 10th, I'll share a full accounting of what his budget means for IDOC.

Other big projects to be on the lookout for next year include:

1. Completing our migration to Microsoft 365 (Q1), making most files available via the cloud, and increasing the ability to collaborate in real time.
2. Rolling out Atlas to replace 3 legacy data systems (end of Q2).
3. Enhancing reentry services statewide to ensure a warm handoff from prison to P&P (Q3).
4. Restructuring our how we utilize beds in our system to create a more intentional stepdown approach to better support reentry (Q4).

I am certain that 2022 will bring us new challenges, and I'm equally certain that we will rise to meet those challenges with the same dedication and creativity that has marked the past couple of years. After all, it's who we are. Thank you for being part of the IDOC team and for showing up in unprecedented ways to help each other and this agency. I'm so proud to be part of this team.

Happy new year!

Josh