

BEFORE THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE SENATE  
Pennsylvania Senate Democratic Caucus Policy Committee Hearing

**Montgomery County Correctional Facility:  
Effective Infection Control and Mitigation for COVID-19**

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Preventing the spread of COVID-19 within congregate settings, especially correctional facilities, continues to be a challenge facing governments at all levels. In Montgomery County, Pennsylvania the Montgomery County Correctional Facility (MCCF) has been diligent in its efforts to stop the spread. This includes implementing key operational changes and following strict CDC guidelines.

In addition, the Montgomery County President Judge declared a judicial emergency on March 12, 2020 which began efforts to reduce the prison population at MCCF. Since then, the population in the MCCF has gone from 1,342 to 797 today a net decrease of 545 which is a 41 percent decrease. The effort to depopulate the facility has made available additional social distancing space to help stop the spread within the prison.

The ability to conduct regular mass testing has also contributed to reducing the spread of the coronavirus within MCCF. To date, four facility-wide testing events were held between April 22 and December 18, 2020.

To date, approximately 5,000 tests were conducted on people who are incarcerated at MCCF resulting in 434 positive cases (8.68 percent positivity rate). 1460 tests were conducted on MCCF staff resulting in 116 positive cases (7.9 percent positivity rate).

Starting in late March, all new admits to MCCF were tested upon arrival. As the pandemic wore on, and after recognizing a large spike in positive tests among new commits to the MCCF, starting October 30, 2020 all new incarcerated individuals admitted to the Montgomery County Correctional Facility (MCCF) undergo a two test protocol before any individual is allowed into the general population. Individuals are given a COVID-19 test, and placed into intake isolation until their test result comes back (36 to 48 hours). If the incarcerated individual tests negative, they are transferred to an intake quarantine unit for approximately 21 days. Around day-14 of those 21 days, the individual will be re-tested. If the incarcerated person tests negative a second time, only then will they be transferred to a general population unit.

Starting December 22, 2020, all MCCF staff are being tested using rapid antigen testing on a weekly basis to help mitigate any new outbreaks. Due to the incidence of false positive antigen tests in asymptomatic individuals, any staff member who tests positive undergoes a confirmatory PCR test and isolates until the results of this test are received.

Since the onset of pandemic, MCCF has recorded one hospitalization of a staff member, three hospitalizations of incarcerated individuals, and one death of an incarcerated person due to COVID-19.

MCCF's medical services provider, PrimeCare Medical, provides medical care and necessary medication to all incarcerated individuals requiring treatment for a variety of medical conditions. MCCF and

PrimeCare Medical have engaged in multiple practices and procedures to combat the spread of COVID-19 within the facility detailed below.

#### **Established Managerial Protocols for Mitigation and Communication Efforts**

- Declared the MCCF to be under Emergency Status prior to mass testing as a result of two incarcerated individuals testing positive.
- Established the assignment of staff responsible for the coordination of the following: COVID-19 Pandemic Incident Commander, Public Information Administrator, COVID-19 Safety/Sanitizing Supervisor, Liaison Supervisor – Point of contact with law enforcement organizations, Logistics/Finance Administrator and Inmate Operations/Housing Administrator
- Provided daily and continuous communication and updates with County Commissioner Arkoosh, COO, President Judge, Prison Board, Adult Probation, and PrimeCare.
- Ensured all changes and action were transparent to all staff. This includes daily morning briefings and updates with Command Staff, department supervisors, medical director and health services administrator.
- Maintaining record of changes in addressing evolving plans of operation.
- Reaching out to any staff members affected by the pandemic.

#### **Instituted Operational Changes within MCCF to Mitigate the Spread**

- No roll calls for on coming staff, provided constant and daily information to all staff by using e-mail (social distancing during lunch and break times for staff, limited and strict monitored movement)
- Strict and controlled movement of incarcerated individuals throughout the jail. MCCF implemented and designated quarantine housing units, isolation housing units, step-down quarantine housing units and step-down isolation housing units.
- Step-down provided housing of incarcerated individuals who were either quarantine or isolation and completed their 14 day monitoring an extended monitoring period with additional activities that were not available in isolation and quarantine housing units.
- MCCF prohibited cohorting of incarcerated individuals for any activity for those in quarantine or isolation.
- Instituted taking of temperatures twice a day for the entire population, both incarcerated individuals and staff.
- Closed gyms, weight rooms, library, and religious services, decreased the incarcerated individual work force, closed barbershop and haircare services.

#### **Provided for Virtual Services to Incarcerated Individuals**

- Closed the jail to outside visitors.
- On July 1, 2020 MCCF implemented a temporary visiting schedule for the incarcerated population. The facility remained closed to the general public, however families can utilize video visits conducted from the trailer that is located on MCCF property.
- On July 13, 2020 MCCF reinstated visiting privileges for attorneys to meet with their clientele. Visits are face to face, non-contact secure visit.
- Offered professional video visitation system to all professional visitors (attorneys, probation/parole officers, law enforcement and mental health and drug and alcohol interviews). This technology was made available at no cost to the visitor.
- Provided the incarcerated population extended telephone calling times and access to tablets where they could access games, videos, music, books, and photos.

- MCCF supervisors/administrators provided updates to the incarcerated individual population by speaking to them in their housing units and responding to questions.

**Adhered to CDC Cleaning Protocols within MCCF**

- Extensive use of sanitizing all areas on a daily basis and use of Personal Protective Equipment. All Incarcerated individuals are issued face masks.
- MCCF continues to order PPE (gloves, face shields, gowns, masks, supplies to make masks for the incarcerated population)
- Work is underway to clean and sanitize all HVAC vents and rooftop equipment at the MCCF.

Combating COVID-19 in a congregate setting is difficult, requires constant vigilance and a close working relationship with the facility health care provider. Because, according to the CDC, over 50% of coronavirus spread is by individuals without symptoms, testing of the entire facility is critical to understanding the extent of spread once a case in the facility is identified. Additionally, congregate facilities, particularly those like a correctional facility, are impacted by the amount of virus circulating in the community. When community incidence goes up, the chances that a new commit or staff is positive goes up in parallel, necessitating increased monitoring and testing within the facility. The cost of these testing and mitigation measures have been covered by CARES Act funding received directly by Montgomery County. Funding of this type is critical to be able to respond to this continuously evolving situation. We look forward to being able to vaccinate all staff and inmates who wish to be vaccinated as soon as we have sufficient vaccine in the 1B phase.