

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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June 16, 2020

To our valued community partners and families,

As CDCR continues to work to reduce the spread of COVID-19, we have made many changes that have greatly impacted not only those who work and are incarcerated in state prisons, but also countless family members, friends, program providers and advocates. This message is sent with sincere gratitude for the work you do every day and the support you provide in so many ways to those inside the walls.

You have borne the burden of many changes, not least of which were suspending visiting and halting group programs. Thanks to your efforts and our partnership, California prisons have become recognized for innovative programs and robust community involvement, and we have big plans for even more positive change. While we look forward to resuming this momentum, for now we have been stopped in our tracks.

Despite our efforts to head off COVID-19 through comprehensive testing, treatment protocols, physical distancing, and sanitation, currently nearly 2,500 incarcerated people have tested positive, as have more than 500 staff members. Sadly, 17 incarcerated individuals and two of our staff members have passed.

To those whose loved ones have passed away, I extend my deepest condolences on behalf of CDCR and CCHCS. My heart breaks for their families, and I pray every day for them and for all who are fighting this disease. For those with loved ones inside, please know our staff are working around the clock, in tandem with public health experts, to keep them safe.

At the same time we are facing a high numbers of cases, rumors are beginning to spread about when CDCR will reopen. Although we are eager to return to standard operations, we must keep the health and safety of all our top priority. I recognize that it is asking so much to wait even longer for visits, programs, or transfers, but I must listen to the experts and insist that we will not resume operations until it is safe to do so, and at this time no decision has been made as to when that will be.

When the time does come to resume visiting and programs, you should be prepared for things to not look or operate as they once did. Safety measures will be in place to promote physical distancing and cleanliness, and schedules will be adjusted to accommodate those vital precautions. We ask for your patience with staff as they adapt to these changes, and I have made my expectations of staff clear to them. Visiting is vitally important and all visitors should be treated with respect and compassion.

Valued Community Partners and Families

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In closing, while I may not be able to give you definitive timelines just yet, please know that I will continue to update you as we move forward. If you have not already, please visit our website, www.cdcr.ca.gov/covid19, for comprehensive information about steps we are taking, and to stay informed on significant developments.

Thank you for all you do to support incarcerated Californians. While we may often be seen as being in opposition, the truth is we have worked together for years to move this system toward one of compassion, peace, and restorative justice – no easy task given the challenges we all face and the scrutiny we are all under. I truly appreciate not only our common goals, but also our diverse perspectives and experiences. I am confident we can continue to work together toward the goal of a peaceful, healthy California for all.

With respect and gratitude,

RALPH M. DIAZ

Secretary

California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation