

Covid-19 still wreaking havoc and fear behind prison walls.

written by admin | May 25, 2020



By Brian, FCI Seagoville (May 10) . . . We need your help. Little is clear in regard to COVID-19. The virus is very unpredictable, but it is understood that merely living with an at-risk individual puts someone at risk. The federal BOP is unable to protect the inmates from a pandemic, and it's not only a result of the cramped layout of the facilities. I've researched the rated capacities at different custody levels, and FCI Seagoville is roughly 144% of capacity. FCI Marianna has three bunks in each two-man room, while FCI Sandstone puts bunks in the hallways (called "trailer parks") to pack more people in. FCI Elkton had a third bunk in each two-man room (cube), and we see how that turned out. Here, at FCI Seagoville, there are 14-man-day-rooms that are only 14 x 30. More than 51 prisons and 21 halfway houses have proved that it's impossible to contain the spread of the virus in such close quarters. As Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said in a **USA Today** article from 4-03-2020, "A second wave of the

Coronavirus is inevitable." What we do between now and then will decide who lives and who dies.

The administration of these prisons is what puts inmates at risk, with a level of complacency that prevents most things from happening in a timely manner. Staff either lacks ambition or balks at change which, in this case, will cost lives. One example is that many staff still do not wear masks, and staff members are who brings the virus inside. The only reason we at FCI Seagoville haven't followed FCI Oakdale or FCI Elkton – where I lived for over three years; inmate William David Hutsell, who died there of COVID-19, was my cellie – in new cases and death toll is fate.

According to the BOP's Pandemic Influenza Plan (Oct. 2012), upon the first human-to-human transmission of the virus, the BOP should have moved to Phase 4 of the Response Plan. January 30 marked the first human-to-human transfer, yet the BOP continued normal operations until 03-26-2020, eight weeks later! We then moved to Phase 4 and, while BOP officials claim staff's temperatures were taken upon their arrival at the facility, guards admit that it's inconsistent and fails to account for asymptomatic carriers. The same steps are being taken at all the prisons to "blunt the virus," but these steps do not prevent outbreaks.

On 04-01-2020, we were moved to Phase 7, with no explanation of what it meant or the reason for the increase. We were told in a memo that mealtimes and recreation would be staggered, but we saw a total lockdown and restriction to housing units. At first, staff was making rounds with no PPE (personal protective equipment), but that tapered off after about a week. Even quarantined, inmates from all housing units work together (with no PPE) in the chow hall, laundry, commissary, MEDICAL, and Unicor. Our commissary spending limit was dropped to \$25 per week, while everything, including postage stamps, vitamins, and over-the-counter medications, counted against it.

It wasn't until the CDC recommended wearing masks on April 4th that staff gave out two masks each and mandated that inmates wear them, while much of the staff still went without. On April 9th, we had our first positive case at FCI Seagoville that we know of (staff has been known to be sick), but there were several inmates who lived in close proximity to me, suffering from "the worst upper respiratory infection I've ever had" as far back as January. There has been NO COVID-19 testing thus far, and Associate Warden Jenkins said there will not be any done here.

Much of the evidence out there suggests that we are far from safe. The Dallas/Ft Worth area is currently a "hot spot," setting records for both new cases and deaths for about the last ten days. FCI Seagoville staff is covering shifts at FMC Ft. Worth, where there exists literally HUNDREDS of active cases, only to return here the following day. Much of the staff, I am sure, lives in Dallas and the surrounding area, potentially exposing themselves (and, subsequently, us) to the virus every day. As inmates, we were ordered to wear masks and to sleep head-to-toe in areas where we are packed in like sardines and social distancing is not possible. Even more, we are forced into confined spaces several times per day (TV rooms, using computers, long phone lines, picking up meals, laundry, commissary, mail call). There is absolutely NO effort being made to find ways to avoid these mass gatherings such as delivery to individual rooms. Then, on April 22nd, although we were under "quarantine," 24 inmates were moved into our building from another, filling every bunk and completely negating the intent of the quarantine.

Dr Kenneth Williams, Medical Director at Tennessee DOC, said, "The virus is everywhere and is easy to move from person to person because many people are asymptomatic." Officials told the media that the federal system expanded testing to find the previously-hidden asymptomatic inmates and that they were doing "elaborate contact tracing investigations," and though I

cannot say what staff is doing at other facilities, none of that is being done here.

Leonard Rubenstein, a professor at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, said, "Unless you do universal testing in all environments, the risk of spread is enormous...if you are waiting for symptoms to emerge before you do testing, you are getting a false picture of what is going on...It's too late." Where mass testing has been done, the results are staggering: Neuse, with at least 22 staffers testing positive so far; 785 prisoners at Lakeland Corr. Facility in Goldwater, Michigan (as of 4/28); more than 80% of prisoners and 160 staffers in Marion, Ohio; more than 60% of the inmates in Terminal Island; and 636 cases and five deaths in FMC Ft. Worth as of May 10.

The BOP's own website (prisonerresource.com/Covid-19) that tracks (under-reports) Covid-19 spread showed a marked increase, rising from 566 (4/22) to 1313 (4/28), while most places saw a 500% increase in less than ten days. Bledsoe Corr. Complex in Pikeville, TN had their first case in 4/12, rising to 162 by 4/20, then to 538 by 4/28.

Attorney General Barr has ordered the increased use of home confinement and expedited release of eligible inmates, with priority given to hot spots, but leaving it up to the BOP to implement. This was a mistake that will cost lives, as evidenced in the severe restrictions that have only allowed for the release of 0.5% of the inmates, completely ignoring a huge segment of the population that is at high risk of dying from Covid-19. Computer sex crimes (which has one of the lowest recidivism rates), especially those that looked at or downloaded illegal images, have been deemed ineligible for home confinement as these are considered violent criminals under a seriously biased definition of the term "violent."

In the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the BOP is playing on the fears and ignorance of the public and, quite

possibly, turning an already harsh sentence into a death sentence. Regardless of what crimes a person may have committed in his younger years, if a person is at the lowest custody level allowed by the BOP for his crime, then he is staying out of trouble, and it is cruel to determine that his life is forfeit, not worth saving.

There are many of us behind these fences for a crime that is more than a decade in the past. If we've moved down custody levels until the only thing that keeps us from a camp is the BOP's "Public Safety Factor," it should prove something. When we are working at Unicor, programming, taking college classes, maintaining relationships and ties to the community while also devoting a lot of time to charitable organizations, it should be a testimony to who we are now. And some of us are not who we used to be because people CAN change. If a chance was taken on us, the majority of us would not let our families or society down again.

I am not ready to write the final chapter of my life.