



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
P.O. Box 41101 • Olympia, Washington 98504-1101

January 28, 2022

Dear Families,

I would like to start with acknowledging that these recent days and weeks have been very tough on you and your loved ones as the Omicron variant spikes and restricts activities and movement for our incarcerated persons. It's difficult enough to be incarcerated; even tougher in a two-year pandemic subject to limits on communication and contact with your loved ones. I have authorized additional spending out of the Incarcerated Individual Betterment Fund (IIBF) and am continuing to do so. This week and next we are again talking with incarcerated individuals, and early next week meeting with some family members and key staff to add to the growing list of things the DOC can purchase out of the IIBF to make the down time less difficult. We are hearing that things like a deck of cards, different toothpaste and eye masks for sleeping are some things that will be great to have.

I've asked our team to put together a plan to provide a series of credits to defray the cost incarcerated persons and their families pay for communication during this time. The plan will provide a \$15 JPay account credit to purchase an item of choice, and a one-time \$10 credit to purchase commissary items of choice. Phone vendor Viapath is providing a one-time phone credit of 90 free minutes to use during this time. Finally, those who paid fees for the third quarter of FY 2022 (Jan-Mar) for the weightlifting program will have those fees waived for the next available quarter when access to weightlifting areas is restored.

The JPay and commissary credits are paid for through the Incarcerated Individual Betterment Fund (IIBF) which is established to provide resources and services for the incarcerated. Our goal is to provide some equity and these credits are intended to help you and your loved ones communicate, so you can be of comfort to each other. We'll be meeting with the Statewide Family Council next week to hear and discuss family suggestions for future use of IIBF funds to support their incarcerated loved ones. Additionally, facility Community Partnership Program Coordinators are gathering feedback from the incarcerated population through the tier representatives and liaisons to add their perspective for IIBF purchase ideas.

Last Friday I met with the Office of the Corrections Ombuds (OCO). They're receiving a wide range of inquiries about COVID, so each week they'll be providing us a list of the top five Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) they've received; DOC will provide answers and publish on a special OCO section of the COVID section of our agency website. You can find the first week's questions [here](#). We're also adding a link to the COVID Bulletin that we send out three times a week with the latest data. You can subscribe to the COVID Bulletin [here](#).

On Saturday we had a well-attended Statewide Family Council meeting—held virtually of course. Emijah Smith was welcomed in as the newly elected Family Co-Chair was well received. The next meeting will be on March 19.

We have deployed more staff from the Washington Management Service (WMS) and Executive Management Service (EMS) at DOC Headquarters to help support commissary and laundry services to avoid delays in these critical services to our incarcerated individuals. These staff are fully vaccinated and are COVID-tested upon entry.

We are watching patterns in COVID case data which gives us reason to be optimistic. Some areas of the nation where cases have experienced sudden spikes have been followed by dramatic declines in cases. While it's too soon to forecast an end to the current surge of cases, these patterns give reason for hope. And if the pandemic follows patterns of the last two years, we are hopeful to see cases statewide drop in the weeks ahead.

Thank you for your support. Please do sign up for the COVID-19 Bulletin. A link is provided above. I also encourage you to follow us on Facebook and Twitter as we build out our communication efforts to keep you all advised of our activities.

Fondly,



Cheryl Strange, Secretary
Department of Corrections