



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

February 4, 2022

Dear Families of Incarcerated Individuals,

It appears that the omicron variant is showing signs of slowing at the moment, plateauing in many of the facilities across our state, with case counts generally stable over the last ten days.

In the meantime, we once again remain on highly restricted movement, due to the number of individuals in our care and custody in isolation or quarantine. Deputy Secretary Sean Murphy and I spent this past Wednesday at the Monroe Correctional Complex, visiting staff and our incarcerated individuals at Twin Rivers, WSR and SOU. I was able to get quite a few cell-front visits in at all three areas, and in spite of the long periods of isolation, I found most people I spoke with to be in good spirits, although just very tired of it all. Some talked to me about baseball, music, commissary, current events, and always a question, “When will this be over?” In general, I saw very moving displays of resilience and courage in both incarcerated people and the amazing staff that support them, as well as a general understanding of doing what it takes to get through this time.

Many of the staff are frustrated with all the overtime but they are getting days off and are clearly proud, albeit exhausted, from doing extensive overtime for months on end.

As you know all too well, DOC continues to experience COVID outbreaks in its prisons and most work releases facilities. You can subscribe to the COVID Bulletin [here](#) to get the latest information. I’m sorry to say that based on the continued level of cases in both incarcerated individuals and staff, we had to make the difficult decision to continue the pause on visitation and extended family visits. This will be reevaluated no later than March 3, 2022. We take this step out of absolute necessity. If the situation improves sooner, DOC will be prepared to resume visitation sooner than March 3.

During this very tough period, I’ve asked staff to continue developing plans to provide additional comfort measures, and discounts for outside communications, all funded by the Incarcerated Individual Betterment Fund (IIBF). These items went into effect on Tuesday. We have also gathered additional input and ideas from incarcerated individuals through tier representatives, as well as meeting with the Statewide Family Council for future expenditures from the IIBF.

Staff from DOC headquarters continue to volunteer and are deployed to facilities such as Airway Heights and Monroe to help with stocking commissary items and other work to address backlogs from staffing shortages created by the variant. They have made great progress in addressing backlogs and are excited to assist with staff and incarcerated persons at those facilities—I saw this in action at Monroe and it was quite a sight to see

“Working Together for SAFER Communities”

long supply lines of incarcerated persons, facility and HQ staff working side by side to fill store orders.

As always, thank you for the support you continue to provide those under our care and custody. In speaking directly with individuals this week, I am acutely aware of how much your support means to them during this time, and how hard they are working to stay positive.

Fondly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chery Strange', with a stylized, cursive script.

Chery Strange, Secretary
Department of Corrections