

**OCO Follow-up Monitoring Visit to Coyote Ridge Corrections Center  
Conducted by LaQuesha Turner— Early Resolution Ombuds and Race Equity Specialist  
June 12, 2020**

**Background**

- The Office of the Corrections Ombuds (OCO) received numerous concerns regarding the Department of Correction's (DOC) response to COVID-19. Additionally, OCO received several requests to enter DOC facilities and perform monitoring visits. After the previous monitoring visit, there was a rapid increase of COVID-19 cases, implementation of restricted movement and elevated concerns from the community. For the above reasons, on June 12, 2020, LaQuesha Turner, OCO Early Resolution Ombuds and Race Equity Specialist, conducted a brief monitoring visit to Coyote Ridge Corrections Center. The purpose of the visit was to observe CRCC's response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

**Statutory Authority**

- Per RCW 43.06C.050, OCO has "reasonable access" to all state correctional facilities in order to monitor compliance with respect to the health, rights, safety and welfare of incarcerated individuals.

**Executive Summary/Key Findings**

- At the time of this visit there were 74 positive incarcerated people, 30 positive staff members, 21 incarcerated people in isolation, and 1,856 on quarantine. OCO staff visited every Tier Representative available and multiple other incarcerated people in medium and minimum units (B, C, D, E, F, and G). Also, OCO staff interviewed incarcerated people housed in segregation, where COVID-19 positive incarcerated people are held.
- Prior to the visit, OCO staff were informed that incarcerated people at minimum and medium levels of custody were released throughout the day from their cells every two hours, as part of the new lockdown procedure. During this time, incarcerated people were able to make calls to their family members, shower, play a board game, socialize, and warm up food. Upon arrival to the facility, OCO staff was informed of minor disturbances that had taken place in G-unit and F-unit as a result of a more restrictive lockdown procedure and lack of bathroom access in dry cells. The new lockdown procedure was a rotation of 20 minutes out of cell every other day and additional bathroom breaks when staff were able to assist outside of their new operational duties, such as preparing and serving meals.
  - OCO spoke with the four men placed in segregation following the breaking of their window in F-unit. It was explained that one of the four roommates desperately had to use the restroom and the doors were locked. Allegedly, when staff refused to allow him to use the restroom, this turned into a verbal argument. The incarcerated person waited until he could no longer, then he threw a lock at the window,

knowing someone would respond. OC (oleo capsicum/pepper spray) was released into the room, which reportedly contained two persons with asthma. At this time, this concern is still under review.

- OCO intended to visit the individuals placed in segregation after the incident resulting in damage of the doors in G-unit, which required a locksmith to open. Unfortunately, during the time of the visit to segregation, there were two medical responses which took priority and OCO did not visit the individuals.
- OCO was informed on several occasions that the population had no choice but to urinate and defecate in their various food storage containers. This was reportedly due to a lack of readily available use of the bathrooms in minimum units, which are dry cells (no plumbing) and infrequent bathroom trips.
  - OCO observed the process used to notify staff of a need to use the facilities—the population slips paper through the door and waits for staff to respond. OCO asked staff about how long this process normally takes. The initial question did not yield a clear answer from staff, but later OCO was informed “as often as possible” and not long after the signal was seen.
- Throughout the OCO monitoring visit, there were no negative interactions observed between DOC staff and incarcerated individuals. The overall atmosphere among DOC staff was calm under pressure, the pressure likely a result of the reduction in staff because of contraction of COVID-19 and trying to maintain a safe environment using an abundance of caution. More than once in various units we heard staff saying “we’re all in this together.”
- The overall atmosphere of the incarcerated individuals was extremely stressed emotionally and mentally. This was due to the lockdown constraints, fear, and lack of communication. In every unit OCO staff visited, there was talk of rioting, something “brewing,” and push back. One incarcerated person noted, “I’ve been on lockdown for over a month, I know I’m strong and encourage others to do the right thing regardless of what they do to us, but I’m breaking mentally and if they don’t do something quick, those still small voices will fade.” There were other concerns shared about lack of legal access, needing cultural and religious practices, communication, and food quality.
  - Concerns regarding legal access and interrupted legal calls were shared with Unit Supervisors to address with staff before OCO’s departure from that unit. The Superintendent also informed us that he has been monitoring the list of those needing legal access, to ensure it is followed through during the lockdown.

- The population informed OCO that consistent communication with them on COVID-19 concerns, less strict constraints, and a phasing down could quell some of the tension. Addressing these concerns might help reduce the widely expressed threat of a riot.

### **Conclusion/ Areas of Opportunity**

- OCO recognizes the extreme stress that DOC staff is under at CRCC at this time. CRCC has received assistance from other facilities to aid in medical staffing, cooking, safety, and cell front deliveries of food and medications. Every staff member was concerned and eager to keep everyone within the facility safe. A few staff members pulled OCO aside expressing a genuine concern for those in their care. These concerns were regarding the transfer of COVID-positive individuals and the impact on the institutional environment, some of the aging population getting their various needs met, and concerns about not wanting to see anyone die from COVID-19. There was an expression of needing more resources including mental health staff available 24 hours a day. The following are areas of opportunity, several of which DOC is in the process of addressing:
  - Extend the time out of the cells-- at the conclusion of the second observation visit, DOC increased the daily time out of cells from 20 minutes to 30 minutes for everyone. DOC also informed us that they are looking for more efficiencies moving forward.
  - Rapidly create a system to respond in the case of a medical emergency, as all cells do not have alarm systems and there are fewer chances of direct immediate communication with staff.
  - Ensure a timely response for use of bathroom facilities. For those with medical conditions that may require more trips to the facilities, create a non-HIPAA-violating process for quicker responses. DOC has placed more staff in the dry cell units to ensure timely access to bathroom facilities.
  - Increase mental health staff availability.
  - Provide in-cell activities and entertainment including televisions. DOC administration acknowledged that these additions are ways to quell some of the tension and boredom expressed by the population. DOC is looking into additional options.
  - Increase communication with the incarcerated population regarding changes at the facility.
  - Create the availability to practice cultural and religious activities, without interruption from cellmates, and in an environment that allows for unrestricted expression of their beliefs.



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June 19, 2020

Joanna Carns  
Office of Corrections Ombuds  
PO Box 43113  
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Ms. Carns:

The Washington Department of Corrections appreciates the opportunity to respond to the 'OCO Rapid Monitoring Visit to Coyote Ridge Corrections Center' completed by the Office of Corrections Ombuds (OCO).

The Department of Corrections takes very seriously the health and safety of the incarcerated population and staff in the Washington state correctional facilities. The agency appreciates the opportunity to have your staff tour the Coyote Ridge Corrections Center and evaluate the facility's implementation of the protocols and procedures, especially cleaning and communication tools, put in place to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The information provided by the OCO was useful to ensure the Department of Corrections is doing everything it can to ensure the health and safety of incarcerated individuals while incarcerated, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

<b>OCO Recommendation</b>	<b>DOC Response</b>
Extend the time out of the cell—at the conclusion of the second observation visit, DOC increased the daily time out of cells from 20 minutes to 30 minutes for everyone. DOC also informed us that they are looking for more efficiencies moving forward.	The facility was able to increase the out of cell time for all incarcerated individuals from 20 minutes to 30 minutes per day. This is still the protocol that is being followed. As the response to the COVID-19 pandemic continues, the department will continue to implement updated protocols and precautionary measures to ensure the health and safety of the staff and the incarcerated population in the Washington correctional facilities.
Rapidly create a system to respond in the case of a medical emergency, as all cells do not have alarm systems and there are fewer chances of direct immediate communication with staff.	The facility has increased staffing levels on every tier to accommodate for being available to respond to incarcerated individuals requests. Those individuals who are on quarantine status do have the

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	<p>ability to open the cell door and call for a staff member at any time, as the doors are no longer double locked. All individuals have a cell mate and would have the ability to open the door and call for help in the event an individual needed immediate attention. For those individuals who are in units that are not able to open the door at any time, there is an informal flagging system that has been used where an individual can flag down a staff member by waving an item in front of their cell. Additionally, a staff member is doing routine cell checks every 15 minutes for all housing units.</p>
<p>Ensure a timely response for use of bathroom facilities. For those with medical conditions that may require more trips to the facilities, create a non-HIPAA-violating process for quicker responses. DOC has placed more staff in the dry cell units to ensure timely access to bathroom facilities.</p>	<p>Every individual that is not able to open their cell door at any time, is being routinely checked on every 15 minutes. If an individual has a need to use the restroom, within 15 minutes a staff member will be able to allow the individual to use the restroom during their routine checks, or can be flagged down if it is an emergent need. For individuals who have the ability to open their cell doors, an individual can open their door and request to use the restroom and a staff member will allow the individual to use the restroom.</p>
<p>Increase mental health staff availability.</p>	<p>The department has mental health staff on call and available at all times. Mental health staff are assigned to a specific living unit and are making rounds to do mental health checks twice daily during the business week. In the event mental health resources are needed after hours, there are staff available on-call to respond immediately. Mental health is continuing to provide resources to the population to ensure their mental health needs are</p>



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	continuing to be met.
Provide in-cell activities and entertainment including televisions. DOC administration acknowledged that these additions are ways to quell some of the tension and boredom expressed by the population. DOC is looking into additional options.	The facility was able to purchase TV's (112) for all cells that did not previously have them. These are currently being deployed to all units. All individuals who own JPay players are able to take them as their property. All units have books, cards, games, and puzzles that are available for use. Additionally, recreation staff have created in-cell exercise packets to encourage incarcerated individuals to participate in in-cell exercise activities. The facility will continue to explore additional ways to quell the tension and boredom.
Increase communication with the incarcerated population regarding changes at the facility.	The facility is communicating with the population on a frequent basis. All information is being printed and provided to each cell individually by staff. Additionally, Superintendent Uttecht created a video that was shared on the local facility TV channel reminding incarcerated individuals about the necessity to follow the COVID-19 precautionary protocols that are being implemented, to include a request for the incarcerated person to come forward if they are sick.
Create the availability to practice cultural and religious activities, without interruption from cellmates, and in an environment that allows for unrestricted expression of their beliefs.	Each individual has the ability, within reason, to practice their religious and cultural beliefs. Even while confined in a cell, they are free to exercise their religion, while the agency maintains the safety and security of the facility in maintaining restricted movement. The facility does have two chaplains that work a variety of scheduled shifts and are available to walk around and provide religious support as available. Currently, the facility is under a restricted movement that will not allow for



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practicing of cultural and religious activities, without interruption from cell mates, in an environment that allows for unrestricted expression of their beliefs.

We also appreciate your team's understanding of the unique implementation across facilities and the addition of policies and procedures being put in place to protect our populations. Moving forward, Washington Department of Corrections will continue to collaborate with the Office of the Corrections Ombuds on any future quality assurance visits.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve Sinclair".

Steve Sinclair, Secretary  
Washington Department of Corrections