



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
P.O. Box 41100 • Olympia, Washington 98504-1110

December 24, 2020

Joanna Carns
Office of Corrections Ombuds
2700 Evergreen Parkway NW
Olympia, WA 98505

Dear Ms. Carns:

The Washington Department of Corrections appreciates the opportunity to respond to the ‘OCO Monitoring Report at Airway Heights Corrections Center’ from both December 11 and December 17, 2020, as completed by the Office of Corrections Ombuds.

The Department of Corrections and the staff at the Airway Heights Corrections Center (AHCC) take 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 AHCC and evaluate the facility’s implementation of the protocols and procedures put in place to respond to the current outbreak of COVID-19 at the facility. The facility thanks your office for the thoroughness and thoughtful approach in monitoring the facility response, and will continue to communicate and provide information to your office as needed.

AHCC is working every day to improve the services available and housing situations for all of the incarcerated population. During the current outbreak, AHCC staff are aware of the changes and impacts these moves have made on the population. Additional phones have been ordered and installed, expanded housing units with showers and bathroom facilities have been implemented for use, cohort schedules have been modified to include time outside and time for video visiting opportunities, laundry services have been contracted out to ensure timely laundry service, and many other proactive facility improvements.

The AHCC health services team and incident management team have been working diligently to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus within the facility. The facility has heard from the population and the Office of Corrections Ombuds of the interest for the K-unit population to return to work, and the facility is working to ensure that it is safe to approve this operational change. The facility is working through broad-based testing to remove the K-unit from quarantine status, and once that status is lifted, clinical leadership and facility leadership will move discussions toward returning individuals to work.



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
P.O. Box 41100 • Olympia, Washington 98504-1110

Beginning in early December, AHCC recognized the need for additional communication to the population to alleviate concerns and confusion based on the scale of the current outbreak situation. AHCC leadership has been distributing regular memos, sometimes multiple times in a day, to provide information pertaining to process improvements, process changes, movement information, current COVID-19 information, and encouragement to continue to mitigate the spread by following the recommended protocols. Additionally, available facility leadership, health services and custody staff are walking the units to provide information and answer questions as they are able.

We also appreciate your team's understanding of the unique implementation of protocols in response to the current outbreak situation and the addition of policies and procedures being put in place to protect staff and the incarcerated population. We will continue to proactively implement precautionary measures as the COVID-19 pandemic progresses. Moving forward, Washington Department of Corrections and AHCC staff will continue to collaborate with the Office of the Corrections Ombuds on any future monitoring visits.

Sincerely,

James Key, Superintendent
Airway Heights Corrections Center