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PRESS RELEASE

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Maine Department of Corrections Announces Easing of Restrictions

The Maine Department of Corrections (MDOC) announced today it will begin to ease certain restrictions within correctional facilities. The decision to ease restrictions, such as those related to visitation, community restitution, work release and transfers, have been made in close consultation with the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC). Many of the restrictions scheduled to be lifted in the coming weeks have been in place since early March.

Visitation
Beginning the week of July 13, 2020, MDOC facilities will reopen for in-person, non-contact visitation for residents of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont and limited to two same-household visitors at any one time. As part of the easing of visitation restrictions, which have been in place since March 14, visitors will need to adhere to the following protocols to ensure public health: symptom screening at entrance, social distancing practices and mandatory wearing of face coverings throughout the visit.

"Family connection goes a long way toward rehabilitation," said MDOC Commissioner Randall A. Liberty. "While we remain cautious and vigilant in our approach to COVID-19, we recognize the need for families to see one another."

Video visitation will continue throughout July for offenders, as will access to alternative forms of communication that have been in place since March 24, including free phone minutes, free text messages and increased access to postage.

Community Restitution and Work Release
Beginning in July, the MDOC will ease restrictions on community restitution and work release programs that were suspended on March 18.

Starting July 6, 2020 MDOC community restitution crews will be permitted to resume work, so long as the work does not require public interaction. The small crews of no more than 10 will be required to abide by all social distancing protocols, including the use of face coverings.

A gradual reopening of the MDOC's work release program for offenders residing at a pre-release facility will go into effect starting July 13, 2020. Up to 10 offenders may be approved for work placements with employers that are not public-facing (i.e., work release will not be approved for restaurants, retail, etc.).

"It's important for MDOC clients to get back to work, for their own sake and for Maine's economy, but we need to take this slowly," Liberty said. "If all goes well, we'll look at approving expanded community work opportunities based on the reopening guidelines later this summer."

Transfers
The MDOC will resume some transfers of MDOC clients between MDOC facilities the week of June 22, 2020. MDOC's facility-to-facility transfer protocol will include negative COVID-19 tests 24-hours prior to transfer and quarantine and monitoring at the receiving facility for 72 hours after transfer.

Working closely with the Maine Sheriff's Association (MSA), a plan to transfer MDOC clients from county jails will resume on a limited basis the week of June 29, 2020. Protocols for the transfer of up to 12 male and 6 females per week include symptom check prior to transfer and upon arrival at MDOC facility, and quarantine and monitoring at the receiving MDOC facility.

To mitigate the risk of COVID-19 contagion, transfers from a county facility will be suspended if that county facility has a positive case of COVID-19. Likewise, the MDOC will suspend facility-to-facility transfers if the MDOC has a positive case of COVID-19.

The MDOC remains committed to practices outlined by the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention and Maine CDC to reduce the threat and spread of COVID-19. Symptom and temperature checks of staff will continue, as will the requirement of social distancing, use of face coverings, and enhanced cleaning practices in all facilities.

"We will be carefully monitoring for symptoms of COVID-19 as we ease certain restrictions," says Commissioner Liberty. "The goal is to find a balance between public health and resuming standard correctional operations."

The MDOC has not had a COVID-19 positive case since May 23, after conducting rounds of universal testing of all staff, contracted employees and clients on the campus of the Maine Correctional Center in Windham.

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