NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

Prisons Temporarily Suspends and Consolidates Some Facility Operations Due to COVID-19 Issues

Raleigh

Nov 25, 2020

Prisons' leadership is consolidating some of its operations to help mitigate the surge of COVID-19 in North Carolina and its impact on the prison system.

This allows the temporary reassignment of staff to prisons in need of additional medical and security personnel to handle COVID outbreaks.

"I am grateful we have such a dedicated, hard-working staff who help out their colleagues as we continue to battle this first-in-a-century pandemic," said Todd Ishee, Commissioner of Prisons. "They are heroes."

Consolidating some prison operations allows more offenders to be medically treated within the prison system, which reduces the stress on hospitals treating non-offender COVID-19 cases in their communities. Doing so also increases public safety by reducing the number of offenders who must be transported outside prisons for medical treatment.

As a result, the following actions were taken:

- Operations were temporarily suspended at Randolph Correctional Center in Asheboro on Nov. 22 and the staff reassigned temporarily to other prisons in the region.
- Operations were temporarily suspended on Nov. 20 at Southern Correctional Institution's minimum custody unit, enabling staff there to better assist in other sections of the prison in Troy.
- Operations were temporarily suspended at the minimum custody unit of Piedmont Correctional Institution, located in Salisbury, on Nov. 25 so the staff can assist in the medium-custody facility in the prison complex.

The impacted offenders were transferred without a major incident to other prison facilities of appropriate custody levels. Stringent COVID-19 medical transportation protocols were used in transferring the offenders to their new prison assignments.

Also, the offenders were transported in cohorts, or groups, that did not mix with each other and were placed in medical quarantine on arrival to their new prison assignments without contact with the general prison populations at those prisons.

These Prisons consolidation actions were necessary due to outbreaks of COVID-19 in the offender populations at a number of state prisons and the need for additional personnel in the prisons handling viral outbreaks.

Other prison operation consolidations may be necessary as COVID-19 cases in North Carolina population continue to move in the wrong direction, further impacting the number of hospital beds available for offenders who need advanced medical care, both for the highly contagious virus and other illnesses.

This surge in North Carolina, combined with anticipated outbreaks of seasonal flu and an existing shortage of medical staff in the prisons, necessitates a greater reliance on Prisons' medical operations.

While the COVID positivity rate in the offender population is roughly tracking the rate in North Carolina overall, the number of active cases in the offender population remains low. Currently, around 560 offenders of the 30,300 offenders have active cases of the virus.

Prisons continues to regularly test staff and offenders for COVID-19 and follows guidance and protocols from the Centers for Disease Control and North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

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COVID-19
(/news/press-releases?field_press_release_terms_target_id=2542)

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https://www.ncdps.gov/news/press-releases/2020/11/25/prisons-temporarily-suspends-and-consolidates-some-facility