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## Office of the Sheriff

Clarence F. Birkhead, Sheriff

June 1, 2020

Ms. Atinuke Diver  
Executive Director  
Durham CAN  
732 Ninth Street, #604  
Durham, North Carolina 27705  
VIA EMAIL: [tinu@durhamcan.org](mailto:tinu@durhamcan.org)

Ms. Diver,

The Durham County Sheriff's Office received your May 20, 2020 letter asking for additional information about our COVID-19 response. Please see my responses below.

1. Will you, to the extent possible, follow the Center for Disease Control recommendations in combating COVID-19?

Yes, as indicated in the April 6, 2020 letter, we follow Center for Disease Control guidelines and meet regularly to review, assess and, if necessary, update procedures.

2. Will you make testing available to all staff and residents?

Residents of the detention center are tested by Wellpath, our medical provider, in accordance with medical guidelines. We do not test staff members. The Department of Public Health in collaboration with the Durham County Emergency Operations Center coordinates testing for individuals who may have been exposed to COVID-19 in the community. Corvel, our workers' compensation administrator, coordinates testing for staff who may have had a workplace exposure. Staff may also receive testing from their primary care providers.

3. How many residents have been tested for the virus? How many residents have tested positive?

Wellpath, our healthcare provider, has tested approximately 24 residents due to potential exposure. None of them tested positive for COVID-19. Should a resident present with symptoms of COVID-19, Wellpath, or public health staff, performs the rapid test, as a means to identify and minimize the risk of the spread of the virus,

4. How many staff have been tested for the virus? How many staff have tested positive?

Neither the Sheriff's Office nor the county offer COVID-19 testing for Sheriff's Office employees who have not had an exposure. As indicated in my response to Question 2, the Department of Public Health (community exposure) and Corvel (workplace exposure) offer employee testing. Some employees may have been tested by their personal physicians and we would not be aware of who has been tested or their results, unless the employee volunteers to share that information with us.



Several laws govern employee medical records and information. Generally, these laws indicate an employee's private medical information cannot be disclosed by their employer as it is confidential. Limited information may be released by the health department during a public health emergency. For more information about testing of county employees, I refer you to the Durham County Emergency Operations Center, the Health Department and the county Human Resources Department.

5. If testing is not available, will you make regular screening for COVID-19 a requirement?

Yes. As indicated in the April 6, 2020 letter, we began regular screening in early March.

6. Will you screen twice daily any staff or quarantined resident that has been exposed to an infected person?

Under our procedures, if an employee has been exposed to COVID-19—either in the community or workplace—we follow the directives of the health department. The employee is not permitted to return to work until cleared by their primary care physician and have completed the recommended 14-day quarantine protocol. Upon their return to work, the employee will undergo our screening protocols applicable to all employees.

If a resident is potentially exposed to COVID-19, the resident would be placed in medical isolation. Wellpath would evaluate and provide medical treatment, including screenings, in accordance with the medical treatment guidelines.

7. Before release, will you ensure that any resident seeking testing be allowed such a test to prevent further spread of the virus to his or her family and community?

The Sheriff's Office cannot commit to testing detainees upon their release. While this is an objective we would like to implement, we do not have sufficient tests to accomplish this goal at this time.

8. If you've answered no to any of the above questions, why?

Please see the responses above.

The safety, security and good health of our detainees and staff is of paramount concern. As a community, we have been battling COVID-19 for more than 80 days. Our public health director, Mr. Rodney Jenkins, and his team work tirelessly throughout Durham County, and with me inside the detention center, to combat the deadly virus. To know that we have been successful at keeping our detention center COVID free, is nothing short of a miracle. We ask for your continued prayers as we continue our efforts to prevent the virus from entering our residential population, and from further impacting my staff. As you mentioned, a member of our DCSO family lost his life to COVID-19. The sadness of losing one of our own makes us fight even harder because we do not want other families to go through what we are going through.

I personally want to thank you for your continued support. Please contact me with any additional questions and, please, stay safe.

Sheriff Birkhead

