



THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

BUREAU OF CORRECTIONS

"Security, Custody, Control"

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Three Inmates at John Bell Adult Correctional Facility Tested Positive for COVID-19

ST. CROIX, USVI – At approximately 3:50 p.m. on Tuesday, July 27, 2021, the Virgin Islands Bureau of Corrections (“BOC”) learned that an inmate at the John Bell Adult Correctional Facility tested positive for the novel coronavirus (a/k/a/ “COVID19) after complaining of mild flu-like symptoms. This was the first confirmed case of COVID- 19 infection at this BOC facility since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic in March 2020.

In response, and in accordance with CDC guidelines, the Bureau immediately conducted COVID-19 testing of all inmates and some staff at the John Bell Adult Correctional Facility on St. Croix and worked closely with the V.I. Department of Health (“DOH”) to conduct a further series of mass testing for all other staff. Following the first confirmed positive inmate, BOC learned that an additional two inmates tested positive that were housed in the same section as the first infected inmate. To further mitigate the outbreak, the inmates who tested positive were isolated and placed in a separate housing unit apart from the general prison population. None of the infected inmates have required hospitalization. The affected inmates are being closely monitored by the John Bell nursing staff. DOH has submitted test samples for laboratory analysis to determine what strain of the COVID-19 virus caused the infections. BOC has notified the COVID-19 positive inmates and staff of their status and is working closely with DOH and CDC to conduct contact tracing to confirm the root cause of the outbreak.

The entire John Bell Adult Correctional facility has been placed on lockdown with continuous disinfectant and cleaning. Inmate movement has been restricted within the facility. All visits by vendors and all inmate transfers have been suspended until further notice. In-person visits, work details, and prisoner furloughs remain suspended, as they have been since the start of the pandemic. Court hearings held virtually remain unaffected. Attorneys may visit with prisoners via secure video conference by contacting the facility to schedule a video visit.

In a proactive fashion, BOC implemented mandatory temperature checks, pulse readings, hand sanitizer usage and continuous washing of hands at each facility along with the more recent addition of a thermal screening monitoring system for anyone (staff, inmates and guests) coming into our

facility. BOC has stockpiled sufficient personal protection equipment, such as N95 masks, face shields, gowns, gloves and Tyvex suits in preparation for any anticipated COVID-19 resurgence. In addition, it has on hand negative pressure isolation tents, which can be used to temporarily isolate any prisoner with an infectious disease. BOC has placed additional masks in the inmate housing areas and has ramped up cleaning and sanitation within the facility. The best way to protect staff and inmates is to prevent exposure.

BOC was one of the first correctional agencies nationwide to offer the COVID-19 vaccine to all inmates, regardless of age or underlying conditions. Twenty-nine inmates, ranging in age from 20 to 66, have taken the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine since the roll out began on February 22.

BOC Director Wynn Timer, said that all medical and correctional staff are capable professionals who continuously work hard to ensure the safety, security and custody of all inmates. The risk of a COVID-19 outbreak or resurgence at a prison or jail increases whenever there is wide community spread of COVID-19 coupled with movement of staff and prisoners in and out of a facility. The Bureau has taken concrete steps to minimize the COVID-19 risk at its facilities, in accordance with CDC guidelines. See BOC Updated COVID-19 Protocols (dated July 20, 2020) and Enforcement of Face Covering Mandate (dated December 17, 2020) (attached).

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