



ORANGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

SHERIFF-CORONER DON BARNES

OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF

July 7, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: COVID-19 Response Efforts

Dear Governor Newsom:

I am writing to provide you with an update on my department's response to COVID-19 and provide clarification on our strategy to eliminate the spread of the virus. Unfortunately recent press reports and questions asked by the media at your press conferences have created the perception of a conflict between the efforts of the State of California and the County of Orange. On the contrary, my department and the County of Orange are working in collaboration with state and federal efforts. Our goals are always to protect public health, respect constitutional rights, keep our economy open, and maintain our public safety resources.

Media reports have focused on my statements regarding enforcement of the public health order requiring face coverings. I want to make clear that I support wearing face coverings in accordance with recommendations by our public health officials. On numerous occasions I have made statements to the media and members of the public on the importance abiding by health guidelines. I have also stated my support for an enforcement strategy based on education, not punishment. While these comments have been portrayed as being in conflict with health orders, I believe they complement California's efforts to address the virus.

From the outset of this crisis my department has taken an educational approach to public health orders. To my knowledge, this approach is similar to that taken by law enforcement agencies across the state. Moving our enforcement efforts beyond education is only necessary in instances where egregious violations occur. On the whole deputies have found that our residents, businesses, and houses of worship have made an ongoing effort to be responsible and do their part to take needed precautions. Punitive escalated enforcement is not practical and would consume resources needed to handle our daily calls for service and work to address violations of criminal law. Additionally the issuance of new fines during this time of economic uncertainty places undue stresses on the public and could exacerbate a peaceful law enforcement interaction into a volatile moment. We will evaluate our enforcement posture on an ongoing basis and can redeploy resources as needed.

The success of our educational efforts is best demonstrated by data. It is important to note that the Orange County Sheriff's Department patrols Orange County's unincorporated communities and is contracted to provide direct law enforcement services to 13 of the County's 34 cities. The communities we patrol are approximately 1/4 of Orange County's total population. As of July 6, 2020, Sheriff patrolled areas account for 1,908 (10.6%) of the 17,882 cumulative COVID-19 cases

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in Orange County. As of July 6, 2020 Sheriff patrolled areas account for 18 (4.9%) of the 366 cumulative COVID-19 deaths in Orange County.

While no death is acceptable, the low portion of cases and deaths in Sheriff patrolled areas demonstrates that our community is complying with recommended health protocols and the efforts to educate the public are successful. We know we must not let our guard down, especially at a time when statewide numbers are on the rise. We will continue to stay the course on our educational outreach strategy, ensure the community follows necessary health guidelines, and be guided by data outcomes in determining the type of necessary enforcement.

Finally, I want to highlight the effort by deputies and health care staff that work in the Orange County Jail. In two months, personnel reduced COVID-19 cases from a height of 220 on May 11 to just 24 remaining cases today. All 24 active COVID-19 cases are the result of new bookings into the jail, which were identified as part of the jail's new booking quarantine policy to prevent intra-facility spread of the virus. There have been no intra-facility COVID-19 transmissions among inmates during the last 45 days, which is demonstrative of the advanced planning and procedural changes put in place months ago to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within the OC Jail system.

Working collaboratively with our health partners, the department implemented a series of changes to practices and procedures to mitigate the spread of the virus, including the wearing of face coverings. Beginning in April, all new bookings into the Orange County Jail are quarantined from the general population for a minimum of 14 days. To help prevent the spread of the virus from the community into our jails, all quarantined inmates, including all new bookings, are tested before being integrated into general housing. Also, any inmate exposed to a COVID-19 positive person is medically quarantined and monitored for symptoms. If any inmate exhibits COVID-19 symptoms, they are also isolated and tested. This concerted effort to eliminate COVID-19 in our jails with early intervention, coordinated communication, and early implementation of CDC best practices have been extremely successful.

This crisis has been hard for all Californians. Those of us in local government recognize the threat to public health and have worked over these many months to implement strategies and solutions that will keep our community safe. As we continue along this path we now face a fiscal crisis that threatens to rob us of the necessary resources needed to bring our emergency response to a successful end. The challenge is momentous, but we have no other choice than to persevere. Your ongoing support is appreciated and I remain committed to working with you and state partners.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions. Thank you for your work on behalf of the people of Orange County.

Sincerely,



Don Barnes
Sheriff-Coroner