



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
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June 3, 2020

TO: All DOC Staff

FROM: Stephen Sinclair, Secretary

SUBJECT: Ongoing commitment to supporting each other

In this time of deep turmoil in our state and across the nation, I want to share my deep and ongoing commitment to you, our Corrections family, and to those we support both within our facilities and in the community.

When we, as an agency, commit to operating a safe and humane corrections system and partnering with others to transform lives for a better Washington, we signify so many different things.

Recognizing disparity

It starts with recognizing the disparity in our experiences in the last several months. We are all experiencing the pandemic differently--and we've had several of the incarcerated and our own Corrections employees impacted by this pandemic in multiple ways. Most recently and significantly, we lost Officer Berisford Morse in the line of duty to COVID-19. These are difficult times for everyone.

However, I hope you will join me in acknowledging some specific effects on our colleagues of color—both due to the pandemic and due to recent events across our nation. Dr. Karen Johnson, the Department's first Equity and Inclusion Administrator, reminds us that the Black population has faced [higher death rates from the coronavirus](#). They've also experienced the trauma of watching people who look like them being [shot and killed while going for a jog](#), [threatened while bird watching in Central Park](#) and [senselessly killed](#) on camera, causing many to wonder when this could happen to them or a loved one.

Ongoing commitment to supporting each other

June 3, 2020

Page 2

Positively changing lives

I have struggled with how to voice my feelings during this time, but I know one thing: we cannot stay silent when it comes to acknowledging injustice and working toward equity and inclusion for all.

Our mission to improve public safety by positively changing lives speaks to our desire to treat EVERYONE with respect and to inspire hope where it was previously lacking.

I know we have all been struggling during this time. I encourage everyone to take a little extra time for themselves, their loved ones and their colleagues—and I hope we will consider and explore how we will do our part to make our state and world a better place.

Cultivate an environment of integrity and trust

Know there is help available. Our [staff psychologists](#) and [Critical Incident Stress Management \(CISM\)](#) teams are professionally trained to help during challenging times. Supervisors and managers should also reach out to help their teams—and individuals can all make a difference by checking in on one another.

Respectful and inclusive interactions

This month, we celebrate [Pride Month](#) in honor of the 1969 Stonewall Uprising—which was a tipping point for the LGBTQ movement. It's also the 50th anniversary of the first Pride march in New York City. While large gatherings have been suspended, please watch for more information on how we can share our support for our LGBTQ colleagues. We also celebrate Juneteenth, the oldest known celebration commemorating the end of slavery in the U.S on June 19, 1865. We'll be sharing more information about Juneteenth celebrations as well.

Our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion goes beyond specific days or months. We honor and respect differences every day.

In closing, I hope we can all reflect on this quote from Nobel Peace Prize winner, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King:

“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there "is" such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.”

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to each other and to our mission, vision and values. Let's continue our work to pursue justice with humanity.