




STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
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January 14, 2022

To: Families of Incarcerated Individuals
From: Cheryl Strange, Secretary 
SUBJECT: **An Open Letter to Families**

As the Omicron variant of COVID-19 impacts our lives and those in our prisons and work release facilities, I want to recognize the challenges you face due to the frequent changes in prison and work release operations as we continue to respond to the changing conditions in our efforts to manage COVID-19.

Since March of 2020, you and your loved ones have experienced the suspension of visits, adjustments to cohort schedules, schedule changes, housing changes, program suspensions and limited movement. We have limited the ability to transfer--causing delays in planning for reentry, connecting families, and receiving services.

This is all combined with the concern you have for the health of your loved ones in our care and custody. The Omicron variant is highly contagious. People who are vaccinated seem to fare much better than those that aren't. If you aren't vaccinated, I ask you to please consider the vaccine and encourage your loved one to do the same. Being incarcerated is hard enough, we want everyone to be as safe as they can and that includes getting protected against transmissible viruses while in custody.

All our facilities are currently impacted in some way by COVID-19. In order to effectively fight the virus and outbreaks, we must move individuals into medical isolation and quarantine, which requires more space in our prisons. This action to move incarcerated individuals is necessary so that we can strike a balance with our current staffing levels and open space available. Much of the nation is facing staffing shortages and DOC is not immune. Unfortunately, we will need to continue to limit programs and visitation as we redistribute staff when necessary to keep people safe. These are very difficult decisions because we understand the impact these limitations have on the individuals in our care and custody. We will make every effort to minimize the impact of these moves, and program closures and will return to regular operations as soon as we can do so. We plan to reevaluate the visitation suspension on February 3, 2022. We hope the transmission of COVID-19 has slowed enough for us to resume visitation in our prisons and work release facilities.

The department continues to make significant efforts to communicate the rapidly changing environment at each facility through our website, kiosk, and email messaging systems and COVID-19 bulletin. To receive the latest updates in the DOC COVID-19 Bulletin, [click here.](#)

We know the sudden changes carry an impact to your lives and those of your loved ones. I do want to recognize the challenges you have faced and the role you continue to play in keeping hope and faith of those in our care and custody. We appreciate you for helping to keep our facilities safe and peaceful. This allows our staff to focus on providing needed care. We cannot get through this without your understanding, patience, and support. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.

I know that this has not been easy for you, your loved ones, and your families, and I want you to know that I know. I take the impact this has on you very seriously, and no decision is made without thoughtful consideration.