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DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
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TO: All DOC Staff

FROM: Stephen Sinclair, Secretary

SUBJECT: Pledge to you

When I wrote this it was day 133 of the Department's COVID-19 pandemic response and I wanted to pause and reflect. We have watched and experienced so much during this time, inside the agency, in our communities and even throughout our country. We are living through some of the most historic times in anyone's lifetime and sadly, we continue to experience the same conflict our country has experienced for decades.

The last 133 days have brought so many highs and lows. As an example of a highlight, I recall all of us pulling together to develop new policies and practices to safeguard our staff and incarcerated individuals in response to this pandemic as we were all learning on the fly. This experience brought me so much pride watching our team of professionals truly performing as heroes in the face of an evolving threat.

At the same time, our state and country were quickly accumulating rates of unemployment that rival those of the Great Depression. Sadly, this is an unavoidable fiscal consequence of what it takes to combat the current threat and keep people healthy and safe as social distancing is an absolutely necessity of the times.

This is true in our personal lives as well as at work. I feel for those leaders around the nation that are faced with this impossible choice. On one hand, we are desperately trying to maintain our economic vitality that only a few months ago most people would have said was a booming economy with record low unemployment rates. On the other hand, we know social distancing is the best defense from the spread of COVID-19, requiring all of us to limit contact and change behaviors that, in turn, hinder our economic vitality. We are watching states experience significant increases in the spread of COVID-19 as they try to open up and rejuvenate their economies.

"Working Together for SAFER Communities"

My empathy goes to all who have this difficult responsibility. Regardless of anyone's political views, these are difficult choices for anyone. I do have faith that everyone in these positions is trying to do the right thing.

Now to the even more difficult part of the recent months, which is the civil unrest happening around the country based on the unfortunate actions of a few who made horrible choices in the performance of their duties resulting in the loss of human life and could have been avoided. It makes me wonder what these people and organizations value. I think of the hundreds of our staff at all levels of the organization who participated in the creation of our agency's mission to improve public safety by positively changing lives and our value statements:

- **Cultivating an environment of integrity and trust:** Corrections values partnership and trust. We foster openness and support courageous conversations. We are committed to doing what we say we are going to do by being accountable and taking personal ownership in our actions.
- **Respectful and inclusive interactions:** Corrections appreciates and values individuals by promoting an inclusive and diverse environment, which encourages safety. We respect, value, and listen to the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of our stakeholders and consider the impact on those we serve as well as each other.
- **People's safety:** Corrections believes in creating an environment that values physical, mental, and emotional security and well-being. We honor those who advance safety for all.
- **Positivity in words and actions:** At Corrections, we assume positive intentions and believe there is a shared desire for the best outcome. We consistently demonstrate positive behavior and always put forth our best effort.
- **Supporting people's success:** Corrections is committed to our community – understanding individuals, instilling hope, embracing change, and providing opportunities

To me our value statements are human-centric, exemplifying what all of us want from each other in the performance of our professional responsibilities, to include how we interact with each other. They give us the opportunity to focus on the positive and help people be better. They are how we have chosen to adhere to the principles of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Respect in our agency.

For all I know, the other agencies where these horrible incidents took place may also have values and they may even look a lot like ours. I know for certain, if that is true, then some individuals took an extreme departure from their values to perform duties in the horrific manner they did.

To avoid this happening to us, we all have an awesome responsibility and that is to hold each other accountable to our values every day as we perform our important work. Make no mistake about it: We are professionals--but it is up to each of us to ensure our actions and words reflect this every day. More than ever before, people who wear a uniform and badge-- as well as those without a badge who work for criminal justice agencies--are in the

public eye and are under extreme scrutiny. Also, unfortunately, not everybody understands this.

As a matter of routine, our stakeholders and those from whom we seek respect are able to point out social media posts or unprofessional interactions that do not reflect the values of this agency; the very values we created. When these events happen it reflects poorly on the individual, our organization and even our chosen profession. This must change. We cannot continue this behavior and the resulting impacts on our organization. We are so much better than that.

I can't speak for everyone, but I can speak for myself and pledge:

“I respect our organization and the people I work with.”

“Every day, I will try to bring honor and respect to our agency and my coworkers.”

“I am not perfect so I am committed to learning, growing and accepting personal change.”

These are just some of the things I can pledge to all of you and our organization. I challenge you to make a pledge to ensure you are doing your part to uphold the values of the Washington Department of Corrections. The first to accept this challenge will be your Executive Strategy Team. In the next couple of weeks, we will share with all of you our shared commitments to each other and this organization.

I started this message with some of our shared experiences and the challenges we all face. None of us knows when we will get past this time, nor what will be on the other side. I do know for certain that if we can stay true to our values and our professional commitments to each other, we will come through this and be in a better place.