



PENNSYLVANIA STATE CORRECTIONS OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

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Patrolling the Toughest Blocks in the State

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Aug. 12, 2021

Hon. Tom Wolf, Governor
Office of the Governor
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Gov. Wolf:

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Corrections employees have gone to work every day in horrible conditions. They have worked excruciatingly long hours and weeks without days off. Throughout this pandemic, they have maintained a level of dedication and professionalism. Your decision this week to mandate vaccinations and/or testing is a slap in the face – and, frankly, way too late because thousands of our members already have been infected, due to your inaction.

This is the latest episode of what has been a woefully inconsistent vaccination/testing/masking policy by this administration in our state prisons. PSCOA has instructed legal counsel to challenge this latest proposed policy change.

We have always believed receiving the COVID-19 vaccine should be a choice for all Americans, but Corrections employees who want it should be prioritized, given our work conditions. In January, PSCOA called on Acting Department of Health Secretary Alison Beam to prioritize COVID-19 vaccinations of Corrections employees.

Instead, smokers were given priority.

Employees were left on their own to get vaccinated. Thousands did just that – when they could find them. Vaccinations were finally made available by your administration two months later at the end of March. Unfortunately, during the winter surge of the virus, thousands of Corrections employees were infected.

Prison transfers only made conditions worse. PSCOA repeatedly called on your administration to stop all transfers. Despite the Department of Corrections' claim that it was safely isolating prisoners, anyone who has even a basic knowledge of how a virus works understands transfers were spreading it from prison to prison.

To date, nearly 3,700 Corrections employees have been infected, but the truth is we expect the number is significantly higher and many more have attained natural immunity. Yet for some unknown reason, natural immunity is being ignored by federal health officials and this administration.

A study done in February in Nature used antibody screenings from California and found seven times as many cases as those that were confirmed. (Study: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-82662-x>)

Researchers from Washington University in St. Louis reported that mild infection immune cells were still capable of producing protective antibodies after 11 months. They concluded that natural immunity to COVID-19 is probably lifelong. (Study: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-021-03647-4>)

Other inconsistencies are troubling and further support our move to take legal action on behalf of our Officers.

Your proposed testing plan is inconsistent and won't increase safety because you don't require other individuals, such as family members of inmates, contractors, vendors or volunteers to be tested.

As for masking, our members are required to wear them, but inmates are not. In fact, the current policy concerning inmate masking states, "No force or misconduct should be issued to enforce compliance." Once again, this does not in any way improve safety in congregate settings.

For months, our reasonable requests have fallen on deaf ears. Pennsylvania's Corrections employees deserve better.

Sincerely,



John Eckenrode, President
PSCOA

cc: Pennsylvania General Assembly