



SUPERIOR COURT *of* WASHINGTON

==== Cowlitz County ====

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For Immediate Release

April 13, 2020

The Cowlitz County Superior Court is aware that as our community, nation and world deals with the COVID-19 pandemic, people are concerned and fearful for their safety and the safety of others. Court staff have been working diligently since February to implement safety protocols to address client, staff, and community safety/health concerns. Our decisions have been made in consultation with the Cowlitz County Health Department and in response to recommendations from the Washington State Department of Health and the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

Recently, the Cowlitz County Superior Court received a number of inquiries concerning safety measures and protocols that have been implemented for the safety of the youth housed in juvenile detention. This media release is intended to address some of those questions and concerns.

Safety and security of the residents and staff in the juvenile detention center has been, and will continue to be our number one priority. Well over a month ago, in response to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), the staff at the youth services center planned and implemented a series of increased operational, health/safety, and programmatic changes to address the health and safety concerns of our residents. We are always deeply focused on the welfare-body, mind, and spirit of each of our residents. As a result of mounting concerns with the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), we swiftly implemented new protocols concerning staff and resident screening, infectious response, strict adherence to social distancing and prescribed standard precautions at all times. We have enhanced cleaning/disinfection protocols throughout the facility, heightened building entry requirements for the few authorized visitors and service personnel. We have implemented new protocols to enhance mental health services as a result of any gaps in services that have been created due to this pandemic. As well, we developed enriched staff-led programming and recreational opportunities for the youth in our care.

In addition, several weeks ago, staff and judicial officers worked quickly to make strategic reductions in the juvenile detention population to increase the overall health and safety postures for residents and others in the facility. Our goal has been to release all youth that could be safely released. The average daily population in detention has been 18-20 youth. Currently, only 4 residents remain in detention.

“I am pleased and amazed with how staff have responded to this crisis. Within a few short days, our staff has re-written the playbook. Youth are as safe as they can be under the circumstances and we continue to provide a valuable service to this vulnerable population and our community”, said Judge Gary Bashor, Superior Court Presiding Judge.

If you have further questions or would like additional information concerning the youth services center, **please contact:**

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