

# INSIDE CORRECTIONS

NEWSLETTER OF THE NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS



## BUILD OUT

SOG assists with the emergency setup of Field Medical Stations across New Jersey in the fight against COVID-19.

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## SOCIAL DISTANCING

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A Northern State Prison officer helps apprehend a fleeing suspect who had an alleged history of credit card fraud.

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*Cover photo: The NJ All Hazard Incident Management Team, along with technical support by the Department of Health and Human Services and US Army Corps of Engineers, managed the physical build out of the 250 bed Meadowlands Field Medical Station. Photo by K.C. Wilsey/FEMA*



# INSIDE WORD

## with Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.

Last month, we shared our plans to address the pandemic impacting the globe, COVID-19. Since then, the NJDOC has put additional measures in place to ensure the safety of our staff and inmates, our highest priorities. In the spirit of transparency and in an effort to provide real-time data, the Department has created a COVID-19 page accessible from the NJDOC homepage that includes an FAQ detailing the steps we've taken, as well as a tracker documenting confirmed cases at each facility.

Some of these measures include:

- enhanced sanitization of our facilities and fleets;
- providing masks to our staff and those in our custody;
- providing information on germ mitigation;
- modifying activities like recreation, education and religious gatherings; and
- suspension of visitations and implementation of reduced rotational work schedules.

The FAQ also details our criteria for testing and provides information on our medical processes for those who have been in contact with a confirmed case or are confirmed COVID-19. Furthermore, both the FAQ and page 4 of this edition of Inside Corrections detail our latest effort to assist with social distancing, and Executive Order 124, which grants the Department the authority to provide temporary emergency home medical confinement to certain at-risk inmates who meet one of four criteria:

- individuals aged 60 years older;
- individuals with high-risk medical conditions, based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 guidance;
- individuals who will complete their sentences within the next three months; and
- individuals who were denied parole within the last year.

We are working hard to build the process that supports both the Executive Order and public safety.

We are facing unprecedented and challenging times, being at war with an invisible enemy. Nevertheless, we remain committed to ensuring the safety of our staff and those in our custody, while also keeping you informed of all we are doing to help flatten the curve.

Be Well,

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Marcus O. Hicks". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Commissioner, Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.



*NJDOC officials have modified operations at state facilities to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.*

# SOCIAL DISTANCING

## *Prison Officials Address Virus Mitigation Challenges*

By Liz Velez

It seems you can't walk into a supermarket without seeing an X marked on the ground instructing you where to stand in adherence to social distancing guidance. Social distancing has become part of our new normal yet, prisons across the United States face their own set of unique challenges with trying to implement it, requiring modifications to daily operations.

“We are taking the issue of COVID-19 very seriously and have modified our operations to adhere to the guidance as best as possible,” said New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC)

Assistant Commissioner of the Division of Operations Michelle Ricci.

Modifications implemented by the Division of Operations include limiting foot traffic in NJDOC facilities to essential personnel, limiting transfers, suspending visitations and modifying or suspending group activities like dining, recreation, religious gatherings, and education.

For example, individuals are provided access to religious materials and are encouraged to practice their faith in their living quarters; recreation has been broken down into smaller groups

with contact sports restricted; and educational programs have been adapted in support of independent study.

In further support of social distancing, Governor Murphy signed Executive Order No. 124 on April 10, 2020, allowing the NJDOC to grant temporary emergency home medical confinement to certain at-risk inmates.

“My Administration’s top priority is the health and safety of all nine million New Jerseyans, including those who are currently incarcerated,” said Governor Murphy. “The correctional setting presents unique challenges to social distancing, particularly for vulnerable populations. Allowing some of our most vulnerable individuals who do not pose a public safety threat to temporarily leave prison will protect both their health, and the health and safety of the men and women working in our correctional facilities. With this action, New Jersey will join several other states, and the federal government, in taking necessary steps to strike a balance between public health, public safety, and victims’ rights.”

Eligible populations include individuals aged 60 years and older; individuals with high-risk medical conditions, based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 guidance; individuals who will complete their sentences within the next three months; and individuals who were denied parole within the last year. Each

case is to be assessed by an Emergency Medical Review Committee that would make individualized determinations of whether home confinement would better serve an eligible inmate.

As part of the review process, the Committee utilizes institutional health records and investigates temporary home confinement conditions and the furlough placement plan in order to determine whether the home is a safe environment for the inmate and those currently in the dwelling. This requires a thorough in-person home assessment for each person who is going to be recommended for release. The Committee must also have received and reviewed input from prosecutors and victims on the potential of placing the inmate on temporary home confinement before making recommendations for release.

After completing its review, the Committee will send the NJDOC Commissioner its recommendations on whether each eligible individual should be placed on temporary home confinement. Placement on a referral list does not guarantee release.

After receiving the Committee’s recommendation, the NJDOC Commissioner will have three days to make a decision on whether to grant emergency medical home confinement.

Individuals interested in learning more about Executive Order 124 are invited to review the COVID-19 FAQ on [state.nj.us/corrections](https://state.nj.us/corrections).





*The New Jersey All Hazard Incident Management Team helped supervise the physical build out of the 250 bed Meadowlands Field Medical Station.*

# BUILD OUT

## *NJDOC Assists with Setup of Field Medical Stations*

By John Cokos

As New Jersey combats the second-highest number of COVID-19 cases in the country, and the medical community continues to overload, the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) is using one of its assets to help assuage the pressure at local hospitals.

“NJDOC continues to play an intricate role within the state’s emergency operations plan,” said Correctional Police Major David Scott, who oversees the NJDOC Special Operations Group. “Through our partnership with the New Jersey State Police and the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management, we currently have four of our

Special Operations Group (SOG) members deployed with New Jersey’s All Hazards Incident Management Team (NJ-AHIMT) in support of the state’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Throughout April, SOG members who serve on the NJ-AHIMT, have assisted in setting up Field Medical Stations (FMS) to serve the northern, central and southern regions of the state.

The FMS, which all meet federal specifications, provide a combined 1,000 additional beds and serve as step-down facilities so local hospitals can increase their capacity for isolation and critical care patients with COVID-19.

Setup of the FMS, the first of which took shape at the Meadowlands Exposition Center in Secaucus, began in late March. Before the end of April, the Secaucus FMS, as well as those at the New Jersey Convention Center in Edison and the Atlantic City Convention Center were in full operation and accepting patients.

According to the New Jersey Department of Health, the FMS are staffed by medical professionals contracted and hired by the state and supplemented by the federal Emergency Medical Services Task Force.

Each FMS was the result of a joint effort involving NJ-AHIMT, the New Jersey National Guard, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and various health officials.

“I think one entity that we’ve not appropriately recognized has been the members of the Department of Corrections under Commissioner Hicks,” said State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan. “They have been phenomenal every step of the way on our incident management team. Secaucus, Edison and now Atlantic City. I wanted to make sure that we give them the proper thanks and gratitude for their assistance in supporting our efforts.”

NJ-AHIMT members from the NJDOC are Correctional Police Lieutenant Clay McClain, Correctional Police Sergeant Kevin McGowan and Senior Correctional Police Officers Michael DiGenni and John McKay. Each brings a different set of skills to the operation, and they have helped supervise the setup and management of each site, from planning to implementation.

“In conjunction with the New Jersey

Department of Health, Department of Defense, and a multitude of private sector organizations, the team tackled two missions back-to-back,” Scott said. “The first mission was to manage the setup and operation of a state COVID-19 testing facility located at the PNC Arts Center in Holmdel. The team organized the operations and flow of the testing site and was accountable for approximately 150 responders during that period.

“Once that mission was complete, the team was re-deployed in an effort to create hospital capacity throughout the state by managing the build out and operations of three Field Medical Stations.”

In addition to aiding with the initial build out, the team’s responsibilities include daily briefings, assisting with each site’s staffing and identifying continuous supply chains for supplying materials and services such as oxygen, medical personal protective equipment, pharmaceuticals, dietary, cleaning and biohazard disposal.

“During this unprecedented time, many state resources have been called upon to secure the well-being of the citizens of New Jersey in order to support the State’s mission of flattening the curve and restoring normalcy,” Scott said.

Both Gov. Phil Murphy and Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli have stated the FMS are necessary looking ahead, as testing becomes more prevalent and the possibility of identifying more cases increases.

“We need the capacity,” Murphy said. “Whether we need it next week, or a year from now, we don’t ever want to be caught off guard again.”





*Senior Correctional Police Officer Stephon Davis identified and apprehended a suspect fleeing from the scene of a crime.*

# BUMP AND RUN

## *Correctional Police Officer Helps Stop Theft Suspect*

By Matt Schuman

It was the bump that first got the attention of Stephon Davis.

The episode unfolded on an early-February afternoon, as Davis, a Senior Correctional Police Officer at Northern State Prison, was about to enter his vehicle, which was parked on an East Orange street. He and a friend had just left a nearby store.

“All of a sudden, this guy ran past me, and he actually bumped me as he passed by,” related Davis, who was off duty at the time. “Then, I saw three

employees come out of the pharmacy right by where I was parked, and they were screaming for help. I was thinking the guy who bumped me must have stolen something or robbed them.”

Davis was unarmed, but that didn’t stop him from taking immediate action.

“I got into my car, and started following the guy,” said Davis, who has been with the New Jersey Department of Corrections since June 2018. “When he got around the corner, he tried to climb a fence behind an apartment complex. I

showed him my badge, identified myself as a law enforcement officer and told him to stop moving, but he didn't listen, so I kept following him."

In order to attract the attention of East Orange Police, Davis eventually positioned his vehicle so that it was blocking traffic and continued his pursuit of the 20-something individual on foot.

"When I approached him, he was backed up against a building, and at that point, he finally stopped running," Davis reported. "I told him to unzip his jacket and empty his pockets. The whole time, he kept saying he didn't do anything wrong."

The suspect was carrying a folder, which Davis confiscated.

"When I looked inside the folder, it contained blank checks," he said. "To me, that was one more red flag."

Shortly thereafter, local police arrived. Davis displayed his badge and state identification card, then recounted to the officers what had transpired. It turned out the suspect had at least a dozen stolen credit cards in his

possession. The employees at the pharmacy told police he had attempted to make purchases using the stolen cards, just as he'd done several times recently. When the employees tried to detain him, he broke free and sprinted out the door. Just a few seconds after escaping from the pharmacy, he first encountered Davis.

"The police told me how much they appreciated my willingness to get involved and that I was able to detain the suspect without being violent and with no firearm," he said.

"I thought about the fact that I was unarmed, and he could have had a weapon," Davis added, "but I believed he might have committed a crime, and I felt it was important to apprehend him."

However, he firmly rejected the suggestion that his response was heroic.

"I wasn't trying to be a hero," Davis stated. "I just wanted to do the right thing. First of all, as a law enforcement officer, you're never really off duty. Secondly, anybody can be a crime victim. If it happens to be me or someone in my family, I would hope someone would help."



## FOR INFORMATION ON OUR COVID-19 EFFORTS VISIT STATE.NJ.US/CORRECTIONS