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Parish of Orleans ~ State of Louisiana

Marlin N. Gusman
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June 29, 2021

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To the Honorable Judges of Criminal District Court:

The Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office ("OPSO") welcomes the return to physical appearances in the Criminal District Court. As you may be aware, we have made extensive efforts to vaccinate as many inmates in our custody as possible. To date, we have fully vaccinated 591 inmates total, 329 of whom remain in our custody. This equates to vaccination rate of 45%. We continue to provide education at the individual level, as well as the incentives we have available, in order to make further progress in achieving vaccination of all inmates. 100% of our staff have been vaccinated, and we are scheduled for our 15th mass testing of staff and inmates in July.

While many of us have noticed and enjoyed a departure from many of the protective measures which were necessary at the height of this crisis, we re-emphasize the difficulties associated with

housing non-vaccinated persons in a correctional environment. This agency simply cannot allow an increase in COVID-19 cases in our facility. We presently have four quarantined housing units in our facility. We additionally have six inmates who are on a separate housing unit pending test results.

We intend to begin transporting inmates to the Criminal District Court on July 6, 2020. Because of the limited space available to socially distance on the newly-renovated docks, we will limit transports to six (6) inmates per section, per day. While this number may seem small, this number actually hits the total capacity of the docks as designed and constructed by the City of New Orleans.

As the risk of COVID-19 transmission among non-vaccinated individuals remains, and as CDC guidelines still require social distancing, mask wearing, and quarantine among symptomatic individuals, we will not transport inmates who have not yet been vaccinated for physical appearances absent an emergent need for their presence. In such an event, the subject inmate would be transported to a special setting which would occur after all of the other inmates in the courtroom have been removed and returned to the docks or OJC. We can ensure you that this is not being done to punish or treat differently any individual who chooses not to become vaccinated. Rather, we simply must take steps to ensure that these and other non-vaccinated individuals are kept reasonably safe.

We further note that our Court Security Division, which is currently operating the Zoom videoconferencing in OJC, will be required to physically return to the courthouse in order to staff that building. As such, we are not able to operate both Zoom and physical court appearances, at least during the morning hours, due to our inability to double-staff the Court Security Division. In the event that a judge or judges wish to conduct Zoom hearings after the inmates of a particular section are returned to OJC, we would certainly work to accommodate those proceedings.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Court to return the criminal justice system to ordinary functions, and welcome any questions or concerns which you may have.

Sincerely,



Marlin N. Gusman
Sheriff

cc: Rob Kazik, Judicial Administrator
Chief Michael Laughlin
Captain Craig Lawson
Blake Arcuri, General Counsel