

The State of The Corona Virus In NY State Prisons  
The Bi-Weekly Address: Part 2

My name is Nicholas Zimmerman. My ID number is 02 A 1663. I am currently housed in Auburn Correctional Facility in Auburn, New York. Today's date is Tuesday, April 21st, 2020 and this is Part 2 of my Bi-Weekly Address of the State of The Corona Virus in New York State Prisons.

In part 1 of my address on the Corona Virus, I recommended several things that Governor Cuomo, Commissioner Annucci, and Superintendent McCarthy could do to stop the spread of the Corona Virus in N.Y. State prisons. Although none of my suggestions have been implemented so far, several officers and Sgt's have told me that they heard my recording online and on radio and some have even said they agree with my ideas on flattening the curb of the virus. However, there are officials in Auburn that are still not taking this pandemic seriously.

On Monday April 6th, 2020, Correctional Officer Harrington of Auburn Correctional Facility actually prevented me from wearing a face mask to the shower; the same shower he refused to let his porters clean thoroughly because, according to Harrington, "all of that cleaning takes too long." When I informed Harrington of the guidelines from the C.D.C., the World Health Organization, the National Institute of Health, and the Corona Virus Task Force all strongly recommending the wearing of the face mask to prevent the spread, Harrington said "I don't watch the news, but if that was true, I would have heard about it." I then brought the issue to Sgt. Teo's attention, Harrington's supervisor, and he said that there was no recommendation from any organization; accused me of lying and said if I wanted to wear a face mask I had to put in a sick call slip to the nurse. When I did submit the slip to the nurse and reported the actions of Harrington and Teo, Sgt. Teo threw my sick call slip in the garbage. I still managed to report the situation to nurse Eric Brown the next day.

On April 8th, I spoke to Deputy Donahue and Superintendent McCarthy about the actions of Teo and Harrington and asked them for an official policy on prisoners wearing face masks? After an exchange, I was left with only the argument by Donahue that there are no reported cases of the Corona Virus at Auburn Correctional Facility. I wanted to say "so should we wait till we get one?" but I did not because Donahue is at least a reasonable person to talk to, unlike others in DOCCS. Amazingly, a report came on CNN the same night in which the Governor of Georgia stated that he didn't know that the virus could be unknowingly spread through asymptomatic people for up to two weeks, even though this fact had been widely reported for almost a month on every news outlet known to mankind. It was at this point that I started to realize that even I had grossly underestimated the carelessness of the Department of Corrections.

Fast forward to April 13th, 2020 and word starts to spread that Auburn's Deputy of Security, J. Corey has tested positive for the virus and that the entire Executive Team at Auburn is now in quarantine because of possible exposure through Deputy Corey. Two days later Wednesday, April 15th, the Department of Corrections finally decides to take the matter seriously and issues a mandate requiring all staff members in the state of N.Y. to wear a face mask or risk suspension. Prisoners are now allowed to wear a face mask, but are not issued the same professional mask the staff get, but are required to make their own, even though nobody explains how? Several prisoners that were disciplined for wearing a face mask before the mandate came down were let out of confinement. It is important to note that at the outset of the pandemic, between February, 13th and February, 20th 2020, Superintendent McCarthy ordered the television / radio broadcasting system to be shut off in Auburn's solitary confinement unit so that prisoners did not know what was taking place on the outside (although he claimed the system was temporarily out of order.) Only when prisoners started to protest did the system come back on. However, this was DOCCS' initial strategy in dealing with the crisis; act like it's not there and it will go away. Same game plan Donald Trump started out with but had to abandon within weeks. The policy that now allows prisoners (and mandates staff) to wear a face mask is far too late because the Virus has now had a head start of at least 45 days to spread throughout the New York State prison system. What has more, there are still some staff members that are refusing to wear the face covering which will weaken the potential effect of anybody wearing a face mask in the first place. Moreover, since Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Annucci has ignored my request to allow prisoners to make phone calls from their very own personal tablets inside their cells, the virus will spread exponentially regardless because everyone is breathing, speaking, coughing, and smoking on the same phone! This, for sure, is a recipe for disaster but it seems as if DOCCS is more concerned with limiting prisoners' privileges and less concerned with ensuring their health and the health of others around them.

In closing, while I agree with Governor Cuomo's handling of the crisis on the outside, I cannot, in good conscious, agree with how he has handled this situation on the inside. For one, far more prisoners should have been released in New York State by now. (Surprisingly, even Donald Trump has done better in this area.) Two, prison visitation and programming should have been cancelled far earlier than when it was. Three, the mandate of facial covering should have been implemented weeks ago. Four; phone calls, video visitation and Wi-Fi should have been allowed directly from a prisoner's tablet as soon as physical prison visitation was cancelled in New York. Five, oversight organizations from the outside should have been allowed in the prisons to monitor DOCCS' compliance with C.D.C regulations and to gain insight from the prison population on how to make the incarcerated community safer during this pandemic.

The only change that was implemented during this crisis was that correctional officers were now forced to make 15 minute rounds instead of 30 minute rounds to make sure that prisoners weren't showing signs of suicidal ideations due to the loss of contact and communication with the outside world. If anything, this only made the situation worse, as officers are now forced to do (even more work) than normal, which creates even more stress and tension for them, which now leads to even more problems in the prison system! The simple solution to all of this would have been to simply turn on the Wi-Fi system in all New York State prisons so that prisoners can email, call and video visit with their families from their cells. If this were to happen, the rate of suicide, violence, tension, and the overall need for additional mental health and medical staff would be dramatically reduced! If only I could get the Governor to listen .....

Sincerely,  
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\*Sign Nicholas' petition for emails, phone calls and WiFi access at [www.bit.ly/coronavirusinnyprisons](http://www.bit.ly/coronavirusinnyprisons)

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