

27 March 2020

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Dear Tiana and Len

### **The Department of Corrections actions in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic Notice and State of Emergency**

Thank you for your letter of 18 March 2020 and my apologies for the time that it has taken for me to reply. I appreciate the opportunity to inform you of measures the Department of Corrections is implementing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I would like to stress that all our actions are aligned with the New Zealand Government COVID-19 alert levels. These measures specify the public health and social measures to be taken at different levels.

We deliver an essential public service in prisons and communities, and we are committed to continuing our work to keep New Zealanders safe. Regardless of the unprecedented situation all New Zealanders face, public safety remains our top priority.

Our operations are now conducted based on the current alert level – level 4. We will continue to align the Department of Corrections operations to the alert levels set by the Government. In order to do this, we have had to put some measures in place that changes the way we do things.

#### *Community-based offenders*

Earlier this week the Department temporarily suspended community work activities carried out by offenders in the community. Our Community Corrections sites are closed.

Probation officers are contacting people serving community work sentences to explain what this means for them. Probation staff will continue to monitor offenders serving sentences in the community via phone. Staff will continue to assist people to source accommodation and provide other practical support as we can.

All electronic monitoring of offenders in the community will also continue as usual, including the installation or removal of monitoring equipment. Reports for the New Zealand Parole Board and Courts will also continue to be completed, with interviews completed by phone or Audio-Visual Link (AVL).

A copy of the current Community Corrections Covid-19 plan is enclosed for your information.

Every community-based offender who would ordinarily report in should now wait for a call from the probation officer.

### *Prison border control measures*

Corrections recognises the criticality of stopping the spread of COVID-19. Accordingly, from midnight on Monday 23 March 2020, all prison sites temporarily suspended the following activities:

- Private visits to prisons
- Guided and temporary release of prisoners (for example, reintegration activities outside prison)
- Non-essential temporary removals (for example, non-essential medical escorts)
- Release to work activities

We realise the impact suspending these activities will have, and do not make such decisions lightly. We have implemented other measures to lessen the impact and to assist them in maintaining contact with whānau and friends, including supplying prisoners with a \$5 phonecard weekly as well as facilitating prisoners receiving emails that are sent to them.

From midnight Wednesday 25 Mar 2020, all prison sites suspended visits by legal advisors, specified visitors and statutory visitors. Some other non-essential activities have also had to be temporarily stopped including face-to-face programmes and some industries (i.e. textiles and carpentry).

I can confirm that there are currently no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in any of our prisons. We are committed to ensuring that we only put in place those restrictions that are necessary and appropriate for the situation. However, these restrictions are important for the safety of people in our care, our staff, and our communities - including your members.

### *Legal Adviser and Prisoner Contact*

The measures we have put in place do not change prisoners' access to phones to provide instruction to legal counsel.

We understand that AVL booths in courtrooms are now in heavy use for hearings. Lawyers should ideally try to contact prisoners by telephone however, lawyers are also still able to contact prisoners using these booths. It is more important than ever that these are only utilised through the official booking system. If lawyers attempt to call into a prison AVL booth using their own phones this could disrupt court hearings that are underway utilising the booth. Please contact the AVL scheduler for the relevant court to arrange a booking.

Please be assured that we continue to look closely at how we can support criminal court operations as the Courts adjust to these new level 4 settings.

This includes an expansion of the use of email communications as you have suggested in your letter. However, it is important to note that postal and courier services remain operating as essential services. Postal and courier services should be utilised in the usual manner as far as possible to avoid overextending prison resources to manage emails during the period of COVID-19 related restrictions. This may result in the prisoner getting the documents more quickly. We cannot guarantee that our staff will be able to print everything out in the order that might be intended.

All prison sites will now, and until further notice, accept email communications sent to the official email address set out in the schedule for prisoners, provided that emails are:

- Sent to an official prison email address on the schedule. We cannot be sure that other email addresses will be regularly monitored or that mail and mail sent to them will be actioned.

- Sent from a recognised email address linked to the law firm, practice or organisation that is verifiable.
- Sent with the following subject title:  
**\*Legally privileged correspondence / documents\* (Prisoner Surname, First name), (PRN if known), (UNIT if known).**
- Comprised of a cover letter and attachment(s) to total no more than 20 double sided pages. Lawyers are advised to courier extensive documents / discovery to site as per standard processes.

We would be grateful if you could communicate the information in this letter to your relevant members. The schedule is current to 27 March 2020, but we will endeavour to notify you of any changes.

We appreciate these are times of uncertainty in many respects. We remain steadfast in our commitment to play our part in maintaining public safety.

Yours sincerely



Jeremy Lightfoot  
Chief Executive

**Prison Email Addresses to facilitate Lawyer correspondence during Covid-19 measures.**

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ARWCF [TrustARWCF@corrections.govt.nz](mailto:TrustARWCF@corrections.govt.nz) or [dhiraj.lal@corrections.govt.nz](mailto:dhiraj.lal@corrections.govt.nz)

Auckland [TrustAuckland@corrections.govt.nz](mailto:TrustAuckland@corrections.govt.nz) or [James.McNab@CORRECTIONS.GOV.T.NZ](mailto:James.McNab@CORRECTIONS.GOV.T.NZ)

Auckland South [Complaints&Inquiries@serco-ap.com](mailto:Complaints&Inquiries@serco-ap.com)

CMP [Trust-CMP@CORRECTIONS.GOV.T.NZ](mailto:Trust-CMP@CORRECTIONS.GOV.T.NZ) or [cmpcsm@corrections.govt.nz](mailto:cmpcsm@corrections.govt.nz)

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