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March 31, 2020

TO: Honorable Alex Villanueva
Los Angeles County Sheriff

FROM: Muntu Davis, M.D., M.P.H.
Los Angeles County Health Officer

SUBJECT: NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE MEASURES TO PREVENT AND CONTROL THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN THE JAILS

First, I want to acknowledge the efforts already taken and those being made to support and protect the County's incarcerated population, as well as the County staff who work in the jails, against the rapidly evolving Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. I also want to acknowledge your efforts to reduce the inmate population by effectuating over 2,500 releases in one month, and our County's District Attorney's Office, Public Defender's Office, Alternate Public Defender's Office, and the Superior Court for joining in this endeavor.

The Board of Supervisors, in its March 23, 2020 executive order, tasked me, in collaboration with the Department of Health Services and its Correctional Health Services (CHS), the Sheriff's Department, the Department of Mental Health, and the Office of Inspector General, to conduct an immediate assessment of Los Angeles County's jails for the purpose of identifying all necessary and appropriate measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the jails and protect individuals incarcerated in the jails, as well as County staff working in the jails, and make any orders necessary for that purpose.

As you are aware, and as of March 30, 2020, five confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been identified in jail staff and in one incarcerated individual. These cases, taken together, indicate an imminent threat of the spread of COVID-19 within the County jails and require that specific prevention and control actions be taken.

Sheriff Villanueva

March 31, 2020

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Staff from the Department of Public Health (DPH), have had consistent and productive communication with the team of dedicated County staff working diligently to address this public health challenge, including those from the Sheriff's Department and CHS.

This situation is fast-moving, and DPH is the County's lead to actively interface with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and with California Department of Public Health (CDPH). On March 23, 2020, the CDC issued Interim Guidance on Management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Correctional and Detention Facilities, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/correction-detention/guidance-correctional-detention.html>. I expect detention facility guidance from CDPH in the near future.

These recommendations inform the best practices for protecting people in our jails, such as advising that no person entering the County jails, including County staff, should be admitted if they are sick or have a fever (either identified on site or through at-home temperature checks in the morning and evening). Also, adequate resources for proper hygiene, such as soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand sanitizers, should be readily available for incarcerated individuals and staff in the jails.

The CDC guidance also includes detailed recommended actions, some of which have already been taken, on the following topics related to COVID-19 in correctional and detention settings:

- Operational and communications preparations for COVID-19;
- Enhanced cleaning/disinfecting and hygiene practices;
- Social distancing strategies to increase the physical space between individuals in the facility, ideally 6 feet between all individuals, regardless of the presence of symptoms;
- How to limit transmission from visitors;
- Infection control, including recommended personal protective equipment (PPE) and potential alternatives during PPE shortages;
- Verbal screening and temperature check protocols for incoming incarcerated/detained individuals, staff, and visitors;
- Medical isolation of confirmed and suspected COVID-19 cases and the quarantine of close contacts, including considerations for cohorting when individual spaces are limited;
- Healthcare evaluation for suspected cases, including testing for COVID-19;
- Clinical care for confirmed and suspected cases; and
- Considerations for persons at higher risk of severe disease from COVID-19.

To support and protect the County's incarcerated population, as well as the County staff who work in the jails against the rapidly evolving COVID-19 pandemic, I also recommend the following:

1. The departments should develop predictions for the impact of COVID-19 spread within each jail facility, both for housing and health services. These predictions should estimate short-term,

mid-term, and long-term growth of the pandemic in the incarcerated population, which is critical to appropriate planning. Outside experts should be consulted, as necessary.

2. Continue to reduce the incarcerated population of the County jails so the County jails can adhere to the standards set forth in the CDC and State's guidelines, using imminent emergency authority pursuant to Government Code section 8658 and in consultation with the County's District Attorney's Office, Public Defender's Office, and Alternate Public Defender's Office, the Department of Health Service's CHS and Office of Diversion and Re-Entry (ODR), and the Superior Court, and others as needed. Priority, where appropriate, should be given to those with underlying health conditions, those who are older, and pregnant women, who are at high risk of severe disease from COVID-19. Capacity to provide adequate health care, particularly in light of the challenges anticipated in the County's health care system as a whole, should be considered in this analysis, including expanded technology solutions, such as telemedicine.
3. Individuals should be released from the County jail with adequate shelter and supportive services, if necessary, and released in a manner that minimizes risk to the community. The Department of Health Services and its ODR, the Chief Executive Office's Homeless Initiative and Office of Emergency Management, and other relevant County partners, should maximize coordination with other justice partners, including the courts and service providers, to ensure that people who are released from custody receive the supports necessary to protect themselves and the greater population. Consideration should be given to establishing dedicated quarantine sites for individuals otherwise qualified for release from custody.

The Department of Public Health and my office appreciate the opportunity to act as a resource to assist in the development and implementation of plans to protect the lives of the incarcerated individuals and County staff in the jails during this health emergency. Coordinated teamwork is the best approach to preserving the public's health, particularly during a public health crisis, and I look forward to continued cooperation and collaboration.