Message from the Secretary

Thank you for subscribing to “Inside Out,” a new publication created by the Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC) designed specifically for the friends and family members of people in the Louisiana prison system. At DOC, we recognize that maintaining strong relational connections with loved ones while in prison is critical to a person’s successful development and his or her return to the community.

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Stimulus Checks

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) provided guidance to prison officials clarifying that a person in prison is not disqualified from receiving a stimulus check if he or she otherwise meets the income eligibility requirements. In October 2020, DOC provided all persons housed in state prisons and local jails with instructions on how to obtain a stimulus payment and information on eligibility requirements. People housed in state prisons and jails also received the necessary IRS form, a 1040 form, to file a claim for a stimulus check.

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COVID-19 Vaccine Education and Access

DOC is currently in the process of administering 1,272 second doses to imprisoned people in Louisiana’s state prisons and expects an additional 3,164 doses in early April. The DOC will continue to vaccinate all eligible imprisoned people, who opt to take the vaccine, on a rolling basis.

More on page 4.

Visitation Reinstated at all State Facilities

The Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC) phased in visitation at Louisiana’s state-run prisons, beginning Saturday, March 13, 2021, at some facilities and Monday, March 15, 2021, for others. As Louisiana moved into Phase 3 and the COVID-19 vaccine availability increased, the DOC continued its work with the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) to maintain safe operations.

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Dear Reader,

Thank you for subscribing to “Inside Out,” a new publication created by the Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC) designed specifically for the friends and family members of people in the Louisiana prison system. At DOC, we recognize that maintaining strong relational connections with loved ones while in prison is critical to a person’s successful development and his or her return to the community. We also recognize that having a loved one in prison can be a very difficult and stressful time for people. Knowing where to start or how to find information can often feel overwhelming. Several years ago, we created the “Louisiana Informational Handbook for Friends and Families of People in Prison” to help loved ones navigate through these challenges. This handbook provides a broad overview of the many facets of the Department and answers to some of the most frequently asked questions regarding the Louisiana prison system.

Additionally, in 2018, I created the Families of the Incarcerated Advisory Board (FIAB) to advise on additional ways that DOC can help friends and families of people in prison navigate through the unique challenges that come with having a loved one in prison. FIAB is comprised of a diverse group of individuals from all walks of life who have experienced these same challenges and who are committed to supporting connections between imprisoned people and their families through improved communication, shared information, issue identification, and resolution.

The new “Inside Out” newsletter is a direct result of the board’s work. The goal of this newsletter is to enhance communication channels between the DOC and loved ones of people in the Louisiana prison system by providing pertinent and helpful information on an ongoing basis. “Inside Out” will be issued on a quarterly basis in the spring, summer, fall and winter of the calendar year and will include articles on a variety topics including Department priorities and initiatives, policy changes, program offerings, criminal justice related legislation, visitation, etc. The FIAB members are actively involved in creating this newsletter through providing recommendations on content for articles and helping ensure the newsletter’s content is responsive to the informational needs of loved ones of people in prison.

It is my sincere hope that this newsletter serves as a helpful resource to you during this time. On behalf of the entire Louisiana Department of Corrections, thank you for your commitment to your loved one in prison.

Sincerely,

James M. LeBlanc
Secretary
Louisiana Department of Corrections
Stimulus Checks

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) provided guidance to prison officials clarifying that a person in prison is not disqualified from receiving a stimulus check if he or she otherwise meets the income eligibility requirements. In October 2020, DOC provided all persons housed in state prisons and local jails with instructions on how to obtain a stimulus payment and information on eligibility requirements. People housed in state prisons and jails also received the necessary IRS form, a 1040 form, to file a claim for a stimulus check. In addition to the blank 1040 form, DOC provided individuals with an example of a completed 1040 form for their reference.

Eligible people in prison or jail could have received three stimulus payments:
- Economic Impact Payment 1 (EIP 1) for $1,200
- Economic Impact Payment 2 (EIP 2) for $600
- Economic Impact Payment 3 (EIP 3) for $1,400

These payments may be higher based on the person’s marital status and number of qualifying children.

People in prison or jail who filed a 2018 or 2019 tax return or receive Social Security Benefits or Railroad Retirement Benefits, should have received EIP 1 and EIP 2. While these payments are no longer being issued, eligible individuals who did not receive the EIP 1 or EIP 2 may file a 2020 tax return and claim the Recovery Rebate Credit (RRC) even if they are not otherwise required to file a tax return. The Recovery Rebate Credit pays eligible individuals the combined amount they should have received from EIP 1 and/or EIP 2. The IRS will check their RRC claim against stimulus check payments already made to prevent overpayments. To file a tax return and claim an RRC, people in prison or jail should fill out a 2020 Form 1040 which is provided by the Department.

To receive the most recent stimulus payment for $1,400, eligible people in prison or jail should ensure they filed their taxes for 2018 or 2019 or file their 2020 taxes.


Who is eligible for a stimulus payment?

People in prison or jail are ELIGIBLE for a stimulus payment if:
- They are a U.S. citizen or Legal Permanent Resident;
- They were not claimed as a dependent on another person’s tax return; and
- They are married or have qualifying children, their spouse and children have a valid Social Security Number (this restriction does not apply if the person in prison or jail or their spouse served in the Armed Forces in 2019).

Eligible people may have their payment reduced by 5% of the income they received in 2019 above:
- $150,000 if married and filing a joint return or if filing as a qualifying widow or widower;
- $112,500 if filing as head of household; or
- $75,000 for eligible individuals using any other filing status.
COVID-19 Vaccine Education and Access

The DOC Medical Director, Dr. Randy Lavespere created a COVID-19 vaccine education video which explains how the vaccine works to prevent the virus. You can view this video at https://s32082.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Covid-Vaccine-Inmates-1.21.21_smallfile.mp4

Regarding vaccine access, the Department of Corrections (DOC) is subject to the vaccine distribution schedules set by the Louisiana Department of Health. The DOC continues to vaccinate eligible imprisoned people and staff. DOC is currently in the process of administering 1,272 second doses to imprisoned people in Louisiana’s state prisons and expects an additional 3,164 doses in early April. The DOC will continue to vaccinate all eligible imprisoned people who opt to take the vaccine on a rolling basis. The DOC continues to coordinate with the Louisiana Sheriff’s Association and local facilities to continue vaccinating eligible state inmates incarcerated in local jails who would like to receive the vaccination.

For more information regarding the Department’s ongoing comprehensive Covid-19 Response visit https://doc.louisiana.gov/covid-19-information/

DOC Launches New Video Series

The Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC) recently updated its YouTube channel with new video resources for loved ones of imprisoned people, DOC staff, and community members. These videos add a new medium of communication to enhance information sharing and are part of a larger department-wide effort to improve communication with the public.

The YouTube channel will feature informational videos about prison policies and legislation, rehabilitative programs, community partnerships, and interviews with key DOC leadership and staff.

To view these video resources and receive updates when DOC posts new videos, subscribe to the Louisiana DOC YouTube channel.
Visitation Reinstated at all State Facilities

The Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC) phased in visitation at Louisiana’s state-run prisons, beginning Saturday, March 13, 2021, at some facilities and Monday, March 15, 2021, for others. As Louisiana moved into Phase 3 and the COVID-19 vaccine availability increased, the DOC continued its work with the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) to maintain safe operations. This includes the development and implementation of reopening plans following LDH’s COVID-19 guidance. Visitation schedules and procedures vary by prison depending on the space available to offer safe visitation.

Prisons have educated people in prison regarding the processes and procedures of visitation during the COVID-19 pandemic. To be eligible to visit, visitors must be on the imprisoned person’s approved visitation list and an immediate family member.

Visitation procedures include the following safety measures:

• Visitors will be required to follow social distancing guidelines
• All visitation will be non-contact
• Plexiglass barriers will separate the imprisoned people and their visitors
• In addition to usual screening at the gate, visitors will be screened for temperature and asked questions concerning their health and potential exposure to COVID-19
• Visitors must wear protective face coverings at all times during the visit
• Only two visitors will be allowed per imprisoned person
• Hand sanitizer will be available at each visiting area
• Prison staff will sanitize the visitation areas and transport vehicles between each session/use.
• Visitors are not required to be vaccinated in order to visit

The DOC suspended visitation on March 12, 2020, to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and protect staff and imprisoned people at the state’s institutions. The Department created a webpage at doc.la.gov with COVID-19 information to keep relatives, loved ones, and the general public informed on the latest developments concerning the pandemic.

Visitation will be done dorm by dorm or unit by unit on a rotating basis. If someone within a dorm tests positive, or is exposed to positive cases, that dorm or unit will be placed in quarantine and visitation for that group will be postponed until they’ve been cleared by medical. Additionally, if at any point the total active cases at a prison exceeds 0.5 percent of the total population of that institution, visitation at that prison will be suspended immediately until the rate falls below 0.5 percent.
Visitation Schedule

**Saturday, March 13, 2021**
- Allen Correctional Center – Saturdays & Sundays, 8 a.m. – 3 p.m.
- Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women at Hunt, Jetson, & Louisiana State Penitentiary – Saturdays & Sundays, 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.
- Raymond Laborde Correctional Center – Thursdays, Saturdays, & Sundays, 8:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.

**Monday, March 15, 2021**
- David Wade Correctional Center: Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.
- Dixon Correctional Institute: 7 days a week, 8 a.m. – 3 p.m.
- Elayn Hunt Correctional Center: 7 days a week, 7:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.
- Rayburn Correctional Center: 7 days a week, 7:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.

**Wednesday, March 17, 2021**
- Louisiana State Penitentiary: Wednesday – Sunday, 7 – 10 a.m. & 1 – 4 p.m. Visitors may contact the facility’s Visitation Department for more information at the following numbers and times:
  - Allen Correctional Center: 9 a.m. – 11 a.m. & 1 p.m. – 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, at (337) 369-6029
  - David Wade Correctional Center: 8:30 a.m. – 11 a.m. & 12:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday at (318) 927-0400
  - Dixon Correctional Institute: 8 a.m. – 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, at (225) 634-6291
  - Elayn Hunt Correctional Center: 7 a.m. – 5 p.m., Monday – Sunday, at (225) 319-4559 or (225) 319-4364.
  - Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women: 8 a.m. – 4 p.m., Monday – Friday, at (225) 319-2324
  - Louisiana State Penitentiary: 9 a.m. – 3 p.m., Monday through Friday, at (225) 655-2343
  - Rayburn Correctional Center: 8 a.m. – 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, at (985) 661-6380
  - Raymond Laborde Correctional Center: 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Monday – Friday, at (318) 876-2891 ext. 268

The Department is currently working on plans to bring back a limited number of volunteers for faith-based programming, as well as ramping up vocational and educational programs to near pre-COVID-19 levels. In addition, plans are being worked out to resume face-to-face attorney visits. Currently, imprisoned people visit with their attorneys via Zoom call and by telephone. All reopening plans will follow LDH’s COVID-19 guidelines and are subject to change as guidelines or COVID-19 prevalence at the facility or in the community change. At this point, there is no definitive timeline on implementation of these additional measures. The DOC will announce to the media and public any changes in regards to visitation and post on the Department’s COVID-19 webpage at doc.la.gov.
Program Updates

The Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC) offers a variety of education programs in the areas of Adult Education, Career and Technical Education, and Post-Secondary Degrees. Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020, DOC cancelled in-person instruction for all programs statewide. However, DOC’s education department implemented distance learning in the areas of Literacy, ABE, and HiSET to allow students to continue their education. Some facilities implemented distance learning for Career and Technical Education Programs as well. Education staff also utilize Personal Protective Equipment as well as other measures to ensure the health and safety of instructors and students. In Summer 2020, education programs began limited face-to-face instruction in some facilities. The Department continues to increase in-person instruction in state prison facilities in accordance with CDC guidelines and Governor Edwards’ statewide reopening phases.

All photos were taken prior to 2020.
Reforms to the Use of Segregated Housing

As part of sweeping justice reform efforts, DOC recently completed a pilot project to reform policies governing the use of segregated housing. These reforms are consistent with the national movement to reduce and eliminate segregation in U.S. prisons and jails.

Segregated housing is any type of housing other than general population. In 2018, the Department closed Camp J at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. This action significantly reduced the Department’s capacity for segregation and symbolized a step towards change for imprisoned people, correctional staff, advocates, and other community leaders.

Furthermore, DOC solicited the support of the Vera Institute through its Safe Alternatives to Segregation Initiative (SAS). This was an extensive project and collaborative partnership and Vera noted in a recent publication:

“Throughout the entirety of the project LADOC leadership was transparent about the challenges facing its correctional system and demonstrated a genuine commitment to reforming policies and practices governing its use of segregation. LADOC leadership has taken steps that went beyond their obligations under the SAS Initiative. LADOC Leadership joined Vera leadership and a delegation of legislators, correctional officials, advocates, and philanthropists on a trip to Germany and Norway to visit maximum security facilities where segregation units are essentially nonexistent and principles of human dignity underpin correctional policy and practice.”

In early March, these changes became effective statewide in all state prison institutions. These changes include:

- Restructuring segregation categories;
- Restricting the use of and length of time a person can be housed in such segregation;
- Requiring ongoing status reviews (weekly/quarterly etc.);
- Mandating privileges while in segregation (rec time, phone calls, programming etc.); and
- Creating a Uniform Disciplinary/Sanctions Matrix to ensure the uniform imposition of sanctions for rule violations.

In 2017, prior to this reform initiative, approximately 2,700 people were housed in restrictive/segregated housing units. In summer 2019, this number was 680 people, equating to over a 70% reduction. Similar to other correctional systems, the Louisiana DOC continues to battle with limitations on staff and resources and unforeseen challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. However, despite these challenges, the Department remains committed to further reducing the use of segregated housing.
Update on Pardon and Parole Hearings

When the Louisiana Board of Pardons and Committee on Parole decided to suspend hearings in 2020, they established and implemented a plan to continue to safely function as Louisiana’s discretionary release authority during the COVID-19 pandemic. On April 15, 2020, hearings resumed under the Governor’s proclamation and guidance from the Attorney General’s Office, using the ZOOM Teleconferencing platform. Since instituting virtual hearings, participation from all concerned parties increased significantly.

After reviewing the new hearing processes, Representative Joe Marino sponsored ACT 6 of the 2020 Second Extraordinary Session, which solidified individuals’ ability to provide testimony to both the Board of Pardons and Committee on Parole via teleconferencing equipment. The Louisiana Board of Pardons and Committee on Parole also created a YouTube channel to broadcast the hearings live. https://www.youtube.com/c/LouisianaBoardofPardonandParole/

For more information on how to participate in our hearings, visit https://doc.louisiana.gov/imprisoned-person-programs-resources/pardons-parole/

LA Informational Handbook for Caregivers

In March 2021, Louisiana DOC published the “LA Informational Handbook for Caregivers of Children with Parents in Prison” on the DOC website. The handbook provides caregivers and imprisoned parents with helpful tips, resources, and strategies to support children who have a parent in prison. The handbook focuses on the benefits of children maintaining relationships with their imprisoned parents, tips for co-parenting with a parent in prison, feelings children may experience during a parent’s incarceration, strategies for helping children cope, tips for answering children’s questions, and information about communicating with or visiting a parent in prison.

To create this handbook, DOC worked closely with the staff, mentees, and caregivers at Daughters Beyond Incarceration (DBI). DBI is a New Orleans-based organization led by two women who are directly impacted by parental incarceration working to enhance the lives of girls growing up with a parent in prison or jail. DOC also adapted materials from The Osborne Association of New York, Correctional Education Association – Wisconsin, and The National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated.

Carlos Arias illustrated this picture for the cover of the “LA Informational Handbook for Caregivers of Children with Parents in Prison.”