



MEDIA ADVISORY

March 17, 2020

Virginia Beach Sheriff's Office releasing some nonviolent offenders into home incarceration in response to coronavirus

Starting today, the Virginia Beach Sheriff's Office has begun releasing some nonviolent offenders into electronic home incarceration in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Sheriff's Office has identified approximately 60 Virginia Beach Correctional Center inmates who may be eligible for release into the existing Electronic Home Incarceration Program (EHIP). To be eligible, they must have 90 days or less left to serve for a nonviolent misdemeanor offense (some nonviolent felony offenders may be considered on a case-by-case basis). Offenders charged with domestic violence or their third or subsequent drunken driving offense will not be considered for release. They must have a safe place to go.

In addition, new arrestees who meet these criteria will also be considered for release into the EHIP.

The goal is to reduce the jail population, which today is 1,338 individuals, and free up bed space. The Virginia Beach Sheriff's Office is taking every precaution to reduce the risk of a novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, infection in the Correctional Center. Among those precautions is an automatic 14-day quarantine of all new admissions, which requires additional bed space.

"The coronavirus is presenting an unprecedented challenge to public safety, especially here in the jail, where we have hundreds of people living in close contact. This is an inherently high-risk population, especially given our number of sick, elderly and immunocompromised individuals. For them, a coronavirus diagnosis could be a death sentence," said Sheriff Ken Stolle. "It is my responsibility to do everything in my power to protect the health and safety of every person inside this jail, including the deputies who go home to their families at the end of the day. We have taken many proactive measures in the past 11 days to safeguard the Correctional Center against the coronavirus – starting with enhanced screening and quarantine of new admissions – and this is the next phase."

“I would never compromise public safety or release someone who poses a threat to our community,” Sheriff Stolle added. “But now is the time for us as a society to decide who we are mad at and who we are afraid of and only incarcerate those we’re afraid of.”

The releases were approved by the attached court order from Virginia Beach General District Court Chief Judge Daniel Lahne.

The EHIP allows the Sheriff’s Office to monitor the whereabouts of offenders using Attenti GPS-enabled ankle bracelets. The system allows for geofencing and tracking of each individual’s location via satellite.

The Sheriff’s Office plans to waive the usual \$3.20/day charge for participating in the program as long as offenders remain on good behavior during their release and return the equipment undamaged. Anyone who violates the terms of their release will be taken back into custody.

The EHIP can accommodate 150 offenders, with eight currently on the program. Last year, 33 offenders participated.

The criteria listed here is not exhaustive and the Sheriff’s Office cannot confirm or guarantee the eligibility of any individual offender.

Any questions or requests for additional information from the news media may be directed to *Public Information Officer Kathy Hieatt: 757.385.8446 (office).*

Additional steps the Virginia Beach Sheriff’s Office is taking to protect against the novel coronavirus are available on our website here: <https://www.vbso.net/coronavirus>.

Photos are available on Google Drive here: [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-CFD - VFaFHRGcKbF_wlb1fB3tXFs51C?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-CFD-VFaFHRGcKbF_wlb1fB3tXFs51C?usp=sharing).