



ORANGE COUNTY
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

NEWS RELEASE

SHERIFF-CORONER DON BARNES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Early release of sentenced inmates from Orange County Jail

SANTA ANA, Ca. (March 27, 2020): Communities across the United States are in the midst of an unprecedented public health crisis. As the novel coronavirus pandemic continues to evolve, the Orange County Sheriff's Department is taking proactive steps to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Three inmates in the Orange County Jail have tested positive for COVID-19, making it necessary to quarantine or isolate portions of the jail population to contain the spread of the virus. As a consequence, it is critical to create additional bed capacity in the Orange County Jail System.

State law authorizes a Sheriff, in cases of emergency, to release inmates from a correctional facility. Under this authority, and in collaboration with County of Orange criminal justice partners, the Orange County Sheriff's Department will be releasing a limited number of inmates prior to the conclusion of their sentence. At this time, Sheriff Don Barnes is limiting releases to low-level offenders with less than 10 days remaining on their sentence and inmates who are medically vulnerable as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and the Public Health Officer. Violent offenders and those who pose a risk to the community will not be released early.

"The decision for early release was made collaboratively and is absolutely necessary to stop the spread of this virus and preserve lifesaving medical resources," said Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Don Barnes. "During this unprecedented moment, with substantial pressure on our health system, we are taking action to protect those in our custody, reduce the risk to our correctional personnel, and ultimately preserve our mission to keep the public safe."

Without the ability to manage the impacts of COVID-19 within custody operations, there is a risk of an outbreak in the jail system. Utilizing the emergency authority to release a small segment of the inmate population is a proactive way to reduce demand on the healthcare system beyond the jail walls and maintain the ability of the jail to keep the most serious offenders behind bars.

To date, the total jail system houses a population of 4,580 inmates. A total of 141 inmates have been quarantined due to potential exposure to COVID-19. Fifteen inmates have been tested for COVID-19, eight inmates have had a negative result, three have tested positive, and four are pending.

The Sheriff's Department has implemented several changes to jail operations over the past few weeks in response to COVID-19. Actions include requiring enhanced medical screening for all inmates, law enforcement, and staff entering the Orange County Jail; temperature screening prior to entering any jail facility; temporary suspension of visiting; and increased access to hygiene and cleaning supplies for inmates.

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