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TEAMSTERS LOCAL 700

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RAMON D. WILLIAMS, PRESIDENT

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September 22, 2020

Cook County Board of Commissioners,

With the COVID-19 Pandemic still a very real threat to society, I am glad the Cook County Board will be discussing and hopefully adopting the resolution to extend the disaster declaration first made in March.

Today, I want to bring to the County's attention another disaster: the Cook County Jail.

Sheriff Tom Dart abused his powers that were bestowed upon him by the County's disaster declaration, and that is why, on behalf of 2,500 Teamsters Local 700 members and Cook County Corrections Officers, I am demanding the County recognize and reward our members for going through hell and back these last 6 months and making sweeping changes to protect its corrections officers.

I would like everyone to stop and ask themselves this question: How likely am I to contract, or have already contracted COVID-19?

If you answered 1-in-50, you're the average American.

If you answered 1-in-15, you're a healthcare worker.

If you said 1-in-5, you're a Cook County Department of Corrections Officer.

Cook County Corrections Officers already face one of the most dangerous work environments in the country, but the pandemic has turned the Cook County Jail into one of the deadliest.

Thousands of first responders and healthcare workers across the country have received hazard pay. The Cook County board has received \$540 million in COVID-19 related relief funding, and we demand that Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle justly recognize and reward the men and women of the Cook County Department of Corrections with hazard pay for all CCDOC officers.

This is not just a worker's rights issue, it's a human rights issue.

Aside from the normal verbal abuse, insults, threats, physical attacks, and bodily fluids lobbed at them daily, these officers are being spread thin and overworked due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Social distancing is impossible inside the Jail. When the Sheriff was forced to open up more buildings to increase social distancing, he was forced to spread thin a unit that was dealing with

10-30 officers out sick each shift due to COVID-19 related symptoms. Since March, four officers have died from COVID-19.

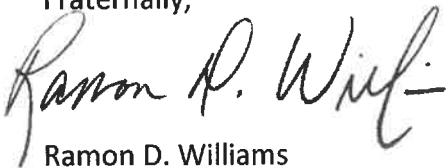
The solution to a short staff? Something the officers refer to as a “mandation”. If supervisors realize there is not enough staff to cover the next 8-hour shift, officers are mandated to work an additional 8-hour shift. Officers are frequently being mandated on back-to-back days and multiple times a week. The Sheriff was only able to do this *because* he had the power to do so under an emergency/disaster clause in the collective bargaining agreement which gives him that power.

The Sheriff was so slow in providing PPE to our members, Teamsters Local 700 stepped up to provide hand sanitizer and masks for its members working at the jail.

On top of the normal stress of the job, and the stress of working at one of the country’s largest COVID-19 hotspots, our members are sleep deprived, working mandatory overtime shifts and had to fight just to gain access to PPE. It’s no wonder *The New York Times* called the jail the “Top US Hot Spot” for COVID-19 in April. A recent study found that 1-in-6 COVID-19 cases in all of Illinois can be traced directly back to the jail.

As President of Teamsters Local 700, which represents the Cook County Corrections Officers, I demand that the County work out a hazard pay agreement to include all corrections officers. I am also demanding that the Sheriff be forced to bargain in good faith during our current negotiations of a new contract, and remove some of the ridiculous, unnecessary, and downright dangerous policies in the current contract.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ramon D. Williams". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ramon D. Williams
President, Teamsters Local 700