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PRESIDENT STEVE CATANESE • SECRETARY-TREASURER JOANNE P. SESSA



April 1, 2020

Secretary Wetzel--

SEIU Local 668 proudly represents almost 20,000 social service workers here in Pennsylvania. Our union includes the Corrections Counselors and other Mental Health staff inside the Commonwealth's State Correctional Institutions. As you're aware, your Department recently indicated to us that these workers will be identified as 'first responders'. This would mean that they would potentially not be covered under the forthcoming Federal Acts that will be implemented on April 2nd.

If you believe that your staff should be classified as emergency personnel, they deserve to be treated with the dignity and respect that such workers deserve.

I was shocked and dismayed to learn that your management team is not more uniformly enacting the use of Alternate Work Schedules (AWS) for workers in the SCIs. Such scheduling allows flexibility for the workforce and their families to deal with complications from COVID-19. Enacting progressive policies like AWS for as many workers as possible will be even more critical if your department denies them many of the protections found within the CARES Act.

As we continue to navigate through the COVID-19 crisis, it's incredibly important that workers who must social distance to protect themselves and their families, as well as those who have ongoing child care issues due to the school closures, have access to this alternative work schedule. It's also imperative that all workers can take the necessary time to stay home if they ever present with symptoms after being exposed to the virus as well.

I'm calling on you as the head of DOC to release and enforce clear, concise language for your management teams on the importance of worksites implementing Alternative Work Schedules (AWS). This cannot be a situation where individual worksite managers can issue edicts that undermine the safety and security of their workforce due to a lack of oversight. Enacting good policies and demonstrating leadership in decision-making processes is what we need to see coming from all levels of DOC management.

My staff and I are more than willing to work with you and your management team to develop steps that can be taken to better-assist all of the workers inside SCIs. I'm encouraged by the initial steps your team has taken to protect inmates and employees, but I urge you to continue to take aggressive protective measures for the benefit of your workforce and the population of our SCIs before it is too late.

Sincerely,

Steve Catanese, President  
SEIU Local 668