

"Covid-19: The Saga Continues"

There have been a number of developments that have occurred since my last report on the conditions here at the FCI Danbury during this Covid-19 pandemic. Some of those developments have been embraced, others not so much.

Although we are still under what the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) is calling "modified operations", some of the previous restrictions have eased slightly.

The most significant change, for me personally anyway, is that since the end of June of last year, I have been working in "Food Service." If you have never worked in the food service industry, or are not familiar with what is involved in the feeding seven hundred and fifty inmates three meals a day, I can attest to the fact that it is a massive undertaking. I cannot tell you with any kind of certainty how much it cost the institution financially to have the staff members prepare and deliver those meals. I can, however, assure you that it was significantly more costly than having inmate workers perform that job, considering that many of those staff members earn in excess of six figures a year and inmate workers between twelve and twenty-seven cents per hour.

Thus, I believe was the basis for the administration's decision to allow inmates to return to work in Food Service. Initially, fifteen inmates were allowed to go to work and, rather than sit in the housing unit all day every day, I chose to join them. Our work day began at five in the morning and ended between six and seven pm, seven days a week. My first month I worked over three hundred hours and my first paycheck was less than thirty dollars.

At the time we were still in virtual lock down - no programs, no education, no religious services, and we were still delivering all meals to the housing units. Needless to say my in-unit work schedule allowed for little else anyway. For several months, it was work, shower, sleep, repeat. It was not conducive to a healthy physical or mental state.

If memory serves me correctly, it was around September when inmates were allowed restricted movements on the compound. Visits were resumed at a much diminished capacity. Education began to resume some classes and inmates were allowed to come to the dining hall to pick up their meals, all one unit at a time.

Several more months passed like this and we remained relatively covid free, aside from the isolated positive test. More inmates were brought into our unit to work in Food Services, as I assumed more responsibility, my pay increased but it was hardly fair compensation for the hours worked so I began taking off one day a week. In general it appeared that we were well on our way back to some sense of "normal."

Then, in late November, early December, the institution experienced a spike in positive cases, causing the implementation of renewed restrictions. Our unit was quarantined for the next month as were several other housing units. Visits were canceled as the daily positivity rate continued to increase exponentially. At some point, and without explanation, the administration simply stopped testing us.

In early January we were allowed to return to work and in February, I received my first dose of the Moderna vaccine.

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In March I got my second dose. Since then we have been consistently told that when the institution reaches a sixty-five percent vaccination rate, we will be able to open up, enjoying more freedoms and less restrictions. Somehow we conveniently remain at sixty-four percent.

As the number of inmates receiving their "jabs" increased, the institution began to allow two units to move at one time. This means they are allowed to work, eat, and recreate together. This began in the month of April and continues as of the writing of this report.

In July it was announced that in conjunction with the recommendations of the CDC, the Federal Bureau of Prisons would begin implementing "Covid matrix operations".

This is a color coded (RED, YELLOW, GREEN) system based on Institutional Vaccination Rates, Medical Isolation Rates and Community Transmission Rates. Currently, we are at "Red" status. While our vaccination rate is at sixty-four percent, and our medical isolation rate is zero percent, the Community Transmission Rate for the city of Danbury is one hundred-three and-a-half per one thousand.

Thus, we are in a holding pattern. We now have more inmates in which to select workers from and I am back to working a somewhat normal schedule. This has given me more time to write and report on the conditions here at FCI Danbury. I am very grateful for this opportunity and I hope to bring additional reports in the very near future.