

# Allegheny County Council

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## Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, June 17, 2020

4:00 PM

Conference Room 1

## Committee on Public Safety

*Liv Bennett, Chair; Sam DeMarco, Bethany Hallam, Cindy Kirk, Paul Klein, Bob Macey  
and Bob Palmosina, Members*

## I. Call to Order

*The meeting was called to order at 4:05.*

### Invited Guests:

**Joe Amon, PhD, MSPH, Director of the Office of Global Health and Clinical Professor in the Department of Community Health and Prevention at the Drexel Dornsife School of Public Health**

**Dr. Homer Venters, Associate Professor, NYU School of Medicine**

**Valerie Arkoosh, MD, MPH, Chair Montgomery County Commissioner**

**Ken Lawrence, Jr., Montgomery County Commissioner**

*Mr. McKain was present from the Office of the County Manager.*

*Mr. Biondo was present from the Kane Centers.*

*Warden Harper and Deputy Warden Williams were present from the Allegheny County Jail.*

*Dr. Amon was present from Drexel University.*

*Mr. Barker and Mr. Varhola were present from the Office of County Council.*

## II. Roll Call

**Members Present:** 0

**Members Absent:** 1 - Robert Palmosina

**Members Phone:** 6 - Sam DeMarco ,Bethany Hallam,Cindy Kirk,Paul Klein,Bob Macey andOlivia Bennett

**Members** 4 - Anita Prizio,Tom Baker,Patrick Catena andNick Futules

**Non-Members:**

## III. Approval of Minutes

[11523-20](#)

Motion to approve the minutes of the June 3, 2020 meeting of the Committee on Public Safety.

**A motion was made by DeMarco , seconded by Macey, that this matter be Passed. The motion carried by a unanimous vote.**

## IV. Agenda Items

### Ordinances

[11507-20](#)

An ordinance of the County of Allegheny, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania requiring that the County test all residents of the Kane hospitals, all inmates at the Allegheny County Jail, and all County employees and contractors performing work at either location for current COVID-19 infection.

Sponsors: Council Member Hallam and Council Member Bennett

*The Chair discussed the current timeline for the Governor's testing initiative in relation to the timeline that would be envisioned by the ordinance, and noted that there would be a cost associated with doing the testing envisioned by the ordinance.*

*Mr. McKain summarized the input that would be provided by Mr. Biondo and Warden Harper, noting that some research would have to be done in order to address all of the issues that the Chair had touched upon.*

*Mr. Biondo indicated that the Kanes have been working on COVID mitigation since early March, with routine guidance from the County Health Department, the Commonwealth Department of Health, the Centers for Disease Control, and others. Since early March, no visitors or vendors have been permitted in the centers, family visits have been permitted only in compassionate care situations, resident trips out of the buildings have been permitted only for medically necessary purposes, and communal dining and other group activities have been eliminated, in accordance with the appropriate guidelines, all staff are screened on a daily basis, residents are questioned for symptoms daily and tested for temperature variations three times a day, and tested for infection when/if symptoms present. Mr. Biondo summarized the impacts of the outbreak at the Glen Hazel Center, and is in compliance with the universal testing requirement imposed by the Commonwealth. Mr. Biondo noted that eight staff members have tested positive, have been subjected to the recommended quarantine procedures, and have all recovered. Mr. Biondo indicated that there are no residents who have currently tested positive in any of the centers, and over 2600 tests have been completed to date between testing and re-testing residents and staff.*

*Warden Harper expressed appreciation for the efforts of the ACJ staff, and noted that the Jail has worked with the CDC, Commonwealth Department of Health, County Health Department, and AHN in working through how to address COVID issues, with all four advisory entities recommending testing in the ACJ setting only when symptoms are present. Warden Harper summarized testing results, discussed efforts at cleaning commonly used and tested areas, and noted that over 1000 inmates have been released through the cooperative efforts of the Jail, Courts, District Attorney and Public Defender. Warden Harper indicated that visitations have been suspended, but that phone privileges have been increased to allow for brief daily calls by inmates to family. Warden Harper summarized screening measures, including temperature tests and questioning, for individuals entering the Jail, noted that all inmates and staff are mandated to wear masks at all times during which they are in close proximity to other individuals, with staff and contractors being required to wear masks at all times in the facility. Warden Harper noted that the last positive test result for an inmate was on May 4.*

*In response to questions from Ms. Hallam, Mr. Biondo noted that all residents and staff members who are physically present in the Kane centers have been tested at least once, described the circumstances which could give rise to an individual being tested more than once, indicated that the Commonwealth only mandates one baseline test with the discretion to conduct more testing depending on circumstances. Mr. Biondo also noted that universal testing was required by the Commonwealth for nursing home settings, indicated that the staff members who tested positive were asymptomatic, noted that contact tracing on those staff members allowed the Kanes to determine whether any residents may have been infected, but that all residents were also tested. Mr. Biondo stressed that the staff members who tested positive were subject to recommended quarantine and contact tracing processes utilized by other entities.*

*In response to a question from Mr. Catena, Mr. Biondo noted that no guidance is*

foolproof, and that current guidance tends to shift over time, because the disease is relatively unknown. Mr. Biondo indicated that the most important thing is to identify the presence of infection as soon as possible, and to take the appropriate mitigation steps immediately when it is identified. Mr. Biondo described some of the difficulties that arise in environments where patients who are dealing with things like dementia are residing.

In response to a question from Mr. Klein, Mr. Biondo indicated that the Kanes' procedures are consistent with what is being done in other nursing facilities, but also cautioned that it is very difficult to discern patterns in what facilities tend to have more infections. Mr. Biondo noted that the Kane's approach has been comparatively cautious, and cited the example of the Kane's guideline for temperature testing being much more stringent than that used by other facilities early on, until the guidelines changed.

In response to questions from Ms. Hallam, Mr. Biondo noted that the universal testing mandate was issued by the Commonwealth on June 8, but the Kanes began testing began on May 19, with a total timeline for the majority of the 2600 tests performed running approximately 10 days to two weeks for all four facilities. Mr. Biondo noted that close monitoring for symptoms is really the only thing that can be done while awaiting test results. Mr. Biondo also summarized some of the logistical issues that have to be accounted for when embarking upon planning a testing program, down to things like sample collection, retention, and labeling.

In response to a question from Mr. Futules, Mr. Biondo indicated that, at least as far as the Kane Centers are concerned, the requirements of the ordinance at issue have already been completed.

In response to questions from Ms. Hallam, Warden Harper stressed that the Jail is following the advice of the entities that are advising it with regard to what symptoms give rise to testing, including cough, difficulty breathing, fever, chills, loss of taste/smell, fatigue, and the other generally identified COVID symptoms. Deputy Warden Williams also noted that other conditions like detoxification can cause similar symptoms, but that new onset symptoms that cannot be explained by other factors give rise to testing. Deputy Warden Williams noted that the Jail's threshold for fever-based testing is 99.9 degrees, rather than the 100.4 degrees recommended by the CDC, and indicated that the testing determination is made by a medical provider. Deputy Warden Williams indicated that individuals entering the Jail are subject to verbal screening, and then temperature tested based on the results of that screening, while inmates are all temperature tested and screened upon entry, while intake units are used as quarantine facilities with daily temperature testing for an inmate's first 14 days in the facility. Deputy Warden Williams also noted that inmates who are in contact with staff or others who have been outside of the facility are temperature tested daily, while inmates who are out of the facility for medical care are tested or screened depending upon the duration and purpose for which they were receiving care, and whether they were tested while there.

Ms. Hallam indicated that she had been told by individuals who were taken to the County Jail from recent protests that they were not screened or temperature tested. Warden Harper indicated that all inmates are screened and temperature tested on entry, and receive a new mask every day. Warden Harper asked that Ms. Hallam forward the names of the individuals to whom he spoke in order to follow up on their concerns. Warden Harper noted that one of the advantages that the Jail has in terms of contact tracing through the pervasiveness of security cameras in the institution, and Deputy Warden Williams discussed the contact monitoring and tracing efforts that the Jail has undertaken and noted that no inmate who tested positive worked in the Jail cafeteria. Deputy Warden Williams noted that, while nonessential contractors were prohibited from

*entering the jail, essential contractors like medical staff were still permitted entry. Warden Harper noted that his intention is to follow the medical advice that the Jail has received to date, and Deputy Warden Williams noted that the Jail's infectious disease guidelines have been in place since prior to the COVID outbreak, are consistent with the advice received by its medical advisors with regard to COVID, and have consistently been in accordance with best practices as currently established.*

*In response to a question from Ms. Kirk, Warden Harper indicated that, while the Commonwealth Department of Health mandated universal testing for nursing homes, it did not do so for County jails.*

*Mr. Macey indicated that he is satisfied with the information that Mr. Biondo, Warden Harper, and Deputy Warden Williams provided, and Mr. Futules indicated that he feels that it would not be Council's place to dispute the experts who have addressed the matter.*

**A motion was made by Kirk, seconded by DeMarco , that this matter be Negatively Recommended. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Members Absent:** 1 - Palmosina

**Members Yes Phone:** 4 - DeMarco , Kirk, Klein and Macey

**Members No Phone:** 2 - Hallam and Bennett

**Members** 4 - Prizio, Baker, Catena and Futules  
**Non-Member:**

## V. Adjournment

*The meeting was adjourned at 5:18.*