



VOL 6: ISSUE 7



MESSAGE FROM SHERIFF HERNANDEZ

As we continue to emerge from the devastating effects of the pandemic, the dynamics of jails across this state and nation are experiencing challenges that are quite taxing on resources. Our jails are no exception. Several factors contribute to today's challenges: increased jail population, ongoing Covid infections, inmate classifications, mental health and the "great resignation."

Prior to the pandemic (July 2019), our jail population was approximately 2,150. This month, our jail population was as high as 2,352. On the surface, that number seems benign as our overall capacity is 3,167, but there's more to it.

Covid continues to impact our community, and whatever illnesses are affecting the Travis County community are affecting our jail population as well. Protecting our inmates and staff from this highly contagious strain of the virus requires isolation housing and unit quarantines. These steps prevent massive outbreaks, but they strain our resources. This month, we brought two of our remote buildings that hadn't been in use since 2018 and 2021 back on-line to accommodate the higher population and prevent the spread of Covid.

In 2019, our jail population included inmates on low-level charges. These low-level offenders are classified as minimum-security inmates and can earn time served credit as inmate workers. Their contribution as workers in the kitchen, laundry, maintenance, etc. is an integral part of keeping the correctional complex running smoothly. Minimum-security inmates make up a tiny fraction of our current inmate population. The majority of our population is in custody on aggravated charges. The deficit of inmate workers means we have to find ways to allocate TCSO employees to those vital tasks.

Nearly 40% of inmates in our custody are battling some form of mental illness. 27% of them are diagnosed with moderate to severe symptoms. This includes symptoms such as psychosis, suicide ideation, delusions and man-

ic or depressive mood. As private hospitals in our area close and state hospitals refuse to accept new patients, the burden of care stays with the jail. Our medical team, in partnership with [Integral Care](#), does everything they can to provide compassionate treatment for these men and women, but a jail is not a hospital, and our state must step up and address this injustice.



Across the United States, the so called "great resignation" has resulted in staffing shortages across various industries. We're feeling the effects of it as well. We currently have staff shortages among corrections officers, deputies, nurses, counselors, and dispatchers. At full staffing levels, the challenges I described would be easier to manage. At these lower levels, TCSO employees are truly going above and beyond in many ways. Deputies who've maintained their jailer licenses are picking up overtime shifts in the jail, civilian and sworn staff are working extra shifts where the needs are greatest.

I continue to be impressed by the care and commitment of the men and women of your Travis County Sheriff's Office. They face difficult situations with grit and determination. They serve with genuine compassion. They're true to the calling of service to others. Are you interested in a job that's more than something to do; that's something to be? This is a place where you can make a difference. We'd love to hear from you.



BACK TO SCHOOL LAWS



School Zones will reactivate this month as students head back to class. Let's remember...

- TCSO patrols more than 20 school zones in Travis County.
- Patrol Deputies work in various school zones every day.
- Don't exceed the speed limit when school zone signs are flashing.
- Using your cell phone in a school zone is illegal.
- Stay in your lane and don't pass other cars until you've cleared the school zone.
- Obey crossing guards.

JULY 4th PARADES



Our Command Staff and Reserve Unit enjoyed celebrating the July 4th holiday at events in the Wells Branch and Mueller neighborhoods. Both locations had a great turnout and we had so much fun visiting with everyone. The day was an excellent reminder of how grateful we are to serve such a wonderful community.



PHONE SCAM ALERT



Phone scams are happening again in our area and have victimized residents of Travis County. The caller claims to be an officer with TCSO and aggressively claims the resident has failed to do any number of things, ranging from jury duty to paying taxes and tells the resident they owe a fine that must be paid immediately to avoid being arrested.

There is a common element in all of these phone scams - the caller seeks immediate payment via gift card or money pack. TCSO will never seek payment for anything via wire transfer, gift cards or money packs.

If you receive a suspicious phone call from someone demanding payment, do not hesitate to contact us at 512-854-9770 to verify the validity of that call before giving anyone money.

These scammers are diligently being pursued by national law enforcement agencies.



In a two-week timespan, TCSO made arrests in two separate armed robbery cases. Each suspect has been connected to multiple robberies in various area jurisdictions.

On June 19th, deputies located a suspect in an apartment complex near a convenience store where an armed robbery reportedly occurred. After an hours-long SWAT standoff, Marcir Tyler, 17 of Austin, surrendered to deputies. Evidence gathered by detectives connects Tyler to multiple armed robberies in Travis County, Austin and Round Rock.

In the overnight hours of July 4th, deputies arrested Phillip Lara, 35 of Pflugerville, and charged him with two counts of Aggravated Robbery after he and a second suspect robbed a fireworks stand in the 100 block of W. Howard Lane. Lara is suspected of additional robberies in the City of Austin.

If you have any information about the suspects or the robberies, please call the TCSO tip line at 512-854-1444 or [report an online tip](#).

TCSO INMATE MENTAL HEALTH TEAM



On any given day, there are 700-950 individuals in the Travis County Jail who have a serious mental illness such as Bipolar Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Schizophrenia, Schizoaffective Disorder or Major Depression, among many other diagnoseable mental health illnesses. Providing care and treatment for them requires a team of 33 highly trained and compassionate professionals including Licensed Social Workers, Professional Counselors and Psychologists (some are in the images above).

Throughout the day, they meet with patients to monitor their wellbeing and safety while providing support and guidance. Each encounter is unique which requires a range of knowledge and skills - most importantly building rapport and trust. A typical day includes duties such as being present as an inmate grieves the death of his parent, advocating for a vulnerable person, coaching an inmate on coping techniques to manage symptoms of their mental illness or ensuring the safety of someone who has lost hope and become suicidal.

Our mental health staff serve members of our community who are often experiencing the most challenging times of their life with compassion and understanding. Their hard work and commitment is commendable - THANK YOU!

POPS WITH COPS



TCSO West Patrol and the HEAT Unit joined the Community Outreach Unit for Pops With Cops on July 29th at the Lago Vista Public Library. The opportunity to serve our younger residents by providing popsicles and a HOT Texas day is a great way to connect with them and their families. Building relationships with our youth and letting them know we're here to help is essential to a safe community.



DISPATCHERS STAYING FIT



TCSO 911 Telecommunications recently received specialized, in-office exercise equipment. The mini exercise bikes sit underneath their desks and come with resistance bands for arm workouts, helping staff stay fit while they take calls.

Our dispatchers are on the front lines of emergency response 24 hours a day, so their physical and mental health are vital. This initiative aims to help them stay in top form as they serve Travis County.