

# Delaware Correctional Officers and Inmates Contribute to Delaware's COVID-19 Response

SMYRNA, Del. – This week, three dozen inmates who are employed in the James T. Vaughn Correctional Center garment shop began producing cotton face masks for the correctional system and first responders as the Delaware Department of Correction steps up to support the First State's COVID-19 response.

These skilled inmate workers normally cut and sew material from large rolls of red and white cotton cloth into the clothing worn by more than 4,200 inmates across DOC's prison facilities. However, As Delaware confronts the challenges of community spread of the illness, the inmates and their Correctional Officer supervisors in Delaware Correctional Industries offered to turn their sewing skills into producing face masks in short supply.

*Governor John Carney said, "As this serious situation evolves, we need to find innovative solutions for pressing issues. That is exactly what the Department of Correction has done by shifting the production within the James T. Vaughn Correction Center to provide greater protection to staff and inmates in DOC facilities. We'll get through this, but we all need to pitch in and take this threat seriously."*

Delaware Department of Correction Commissioner **Claire DeMatteis** said, "We say often that 'we are all in this together,' and this initiative by correctional officers and offenders demonstrates that we all want to do our part to help slow the spread of COVID-19. It's a real-time, real-life demonstration of DOC's dual mission of public safety and

offender rehabilitation.”

The mask production effort was originally presented to the DOC by Delaware Correctional Industries Trades Instructor Dion Hawkins, who worked collaboratively with Trades Instructors Lori Quinney Craig Devries, Lee Lepore, Frank Kulhanek and Brett Smith and their team of inmate workers to design and produce a prototype mask last week using two layers of cotton cloth in stock, sewn together around a polyester filter designed to remove particles down to 3-10 microns in size.

Production began Monday on two sewing machines, and by mid-week daily volume increased to nearly 100 face masks. Up to a dozen inmates will support the operation by cutting patterns and sorting and packing masks, while up to two dozen inmates will operate sewing machines to stitch the materials and add elastic ear loops. At full production capacity, DOC estimates that it will be able to produce up to 500 face masks each week.

Face masks produced at James T. Vaughn Correctional Center will be used, as necessary, in DOC facilities to protect staff, inmates and contractors. Once inventory increases, the face masks will be offered to other first responders. DOC's infirmaries and isolation units will continue to use medical grade FDA-certified face masks and other Personal Protective Equipment produced by national manufacturers.

Hourly wages for inmate workers are set by state statute and hourly pay rates for inmates employed in the garment shop at James T. Vaughn Correctional Center range between .25 and \$2.00 per hour depending on skill level and length of service.

*Delawareans with general questions about COVID-19 or their exposure risk can call the Division of Public Health's Coronavirus Call Center at [1-866-408-1899](tel:1-866-408-1899), or 711 for individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, from 8:30 a.m.*

to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Questions can also be submitted by email at [DPHCall@delaware.gov](mailto:DPHCall@delaware.gov).

DPH will continue to update the public as more information becomes available. For the latest on Delaware's response, go to [de.gov/coronavirus](https://de.gov/coronavirus).

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