

Don Brewer, Human Resources Director

June 8, 2020

To: Jim Gailey, Cumberland County Manager
From: Don Brewer, Human Resources Director
RE: Pandemic Adjustments - HR Work Environment & Operations

Jim,

In response to your 05-27-20 email requesting a synopsis of staffing, work environment, and operational changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic over the past three months, I offer the following overview from the HR Department:

STAFFING THE OFFICE

- “Thinning the Herd” – the HR Office remained open throughout the pandemic with reduced staffing on a rotating basis, with one or two employees teleworking from home each day, and two or three employees physically in the office.

OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

- Staff disinfected common surfaces and counter areas, daily.
- Hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and masks were readily available/used.
- Staff frequently washed hands, used hand sanitizer, and socially distanced from other employees/individuals at least 6 ft.
- Tape barrier lines were placed on the floor to define 6 ft. areas to protect staff.
- A plexi-glass barrier was ordered for Carrie Hall’s workstation, which is the closest and initial point of contact for visitors to the office; awaiting delivery and installation
- Significant reduction in employee visits and foot traffic in the HR office
- Staff began using the employee entrance on Pearl Street to enter & exit the courthouse.

VIDEO & TELEPHONE CONFERENCES

- During the pandemic, video or telephone conferences and telephone conferences have been the norm for meetings, interviews, grievance hearings, pre-determination hearings, labor/management meetings, new employee orientations & benefits enrollment, outside resource meetings/consultations (I.e., legal/attorneys), etc.
- In person meetings & group trainings have not been scheduled, or have been postponed, except in rare situations where social distancing was maintained.

HIRING

- At the outset of the pandemic, a hiring freeze was instituted for all vacant County positions, with the exception of Corrections Officers and (Blue pin) Patrol Deputies.
- HR witnessed a significant increase in the number of Corrections Officer (CO) applications received, likely due to the high unemployment rate associated with the pandemic. CO interviews were held via video conference; applications & associated paperwork were submitted electronically.

COMPENSATION, BENEFITS, WORKERS' COMP & LEAVES OF ABSENCE

- Increased scanning and emailing of Personnel Action Forms (PAFs) and employee leaves of absence memos between HR & Finance; no paper/hard copy forms or memos were exchanged
- Emailed weekly payroll to Christine Hyland in Finance who has been working remotely during the pandemic

LABOR RELATIONS

- A number of NCEU grievances & arbitrations have been held in abeyance during the pandemic
- Contract mediation with NCEU was tabled due to the pandemic and 14-day quarantine requirement for out of state visitors (original mediator was from Maryland), social distancing & group size restrictions.
- Early on, there were requests from NCEU, Teamster Supervisors and CCCA for additional hazard pay at the Jail and CC Regional Communications Center

OPERATIONS

- A number of personnel matters, research items, projects, and supervisor trainings were put on hold, or postponed; adhered to budget freeze

- Early on, HR focused on COVID-19 related response and precautions, monitoring the CDC for the latest developments (which seemed to change & increase daily), guidance, and working with County management to communicate to employees/supervisors information and safety procedures
- Educated employees on the availability of additional paid leave for COVID-19 related reasons, such as the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), and up to 80 hours for County Emergency Responders
- HR staff did not travel in person to the Sheriff's Office, Jail, EMA, CCRCC, Deeds/Assessing for meetings or other work-related purposes. All meetings and interactions with County staff not located at the courthouse were conducted by video or telephone conference, or through email.
- HR Generalist, Carrie Hall, assisted EMA Dept. with monitoring press conferences with Dr. Shah & Gov. Mills, and other COVID-19 pandemic tracking & spreadsheet work.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON CHANGES TO KEEP AS WE TRANSITION TO NORMALCY

- **Continued utilization of video conferencing** where appropriate, efficient & cost effective. I feel the increased and regular use of video-conferencing is here to stay as a norm in the modern workplace.
- **Teleworking.** There are some employees who have the capability to work effectively and productively from home or other remote locations. There are occasions when employees may work more productively and effectively from home when focused, detailed work is required to meet deadlines and project deliverables, free from office distractions & interruptions. With a solid teleworking policy in place, including home office ergonomics, increased teleworking has its place in the modern definition of "work."