



COMMON GROUND

FEBRUARY 2021 ISSUE



SCSD BEGINS COVID-19 VACCINE DISTRIBUTION ROLLOUT





SHERIFF'S STATEMENT

FEBRUARY, 2021

Greetings,

In this issue of the Common Ground newsletter, we train our focus on the start of our COVID-19 vaccination program within our two facilities, the Suffolk County House of Correction and the Suffolk County Jail. As part of the first phase of vaccination rollout across Massachusetts, as prescribed by the Department of Public Health, we have begun offering vaccinations of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to staff, inmates and detainees as part of the critically important effort to slow and eventually halt this pandemic, which has already claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and infected countless others.

As part of that program, we are offering the vaccine in conjunction with an information campaign that is helping to demystify and debunk some of the concerns that persist about the safety of the vaccine. To this end, we recently invited a group of medical professionals and members of the clergy into both of our facilities for six sessions during which they spoke with inmates and detainees, fielding questions and providing information to help allay any fears about taking the vaccine.

In addition to these stories, we also highlight one of our partner organizations, the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, in our ongoing "Partner of the Month" series; we turn the spotlight on our newest academy of correction officer hopefuls: and we announce my return to the mantle of Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association President; among other features.

I hope that you'll enjoy reading about these and other topics in this edition, and I look forward to bringing you more insight and information about the form and functions of the Department in the issues to come.

-Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins

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The SCSD started its vaccination program for staff, inmates and detainees to inoculate them against the COVID-19 virus.

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This month, we talk to Incarcerated Survivor Support Program Manager for the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC), Dave Rini.

SHERIFF TOMPKINS NAMED MSA PRESIDENT

Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins was once again elected to serve as the President of the Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association.

THE DEPARTMENT REMEMBERS ONE OF ITS OWN

The SCSD mourns the loss of Officer Anthony Diaz, a six-year veteran of the Suffolk County House of Correction.

SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT WELCOMES PANEL OF DOCTORS, CLERGY TO DISPEL APPREHENSION OVER COVID-19 VACCINE

The Suffolk County Sheriff's Department recently welcomed a group comprised of medical professionals and members of the clergy to help allay apprehension about taking the COVID-19 vaccine among inmates and detainees.

Led by Reverend Liz Walker, Pastor of Roxbury Presbyterian Church and a member of Governor Charlie Baker's Advisory Group on COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution; and featuring infectious disease specialist Dr. Alysse Wurcel of Tufts Medical Center; Dr. Paulette Chandler of Brigham and Women's Hospital and an Associate Professor at Harvard Medical School; and Reverend Dr. Gloria White Hammond, Co-Pastor of Bethel AME Church and also a medical doctor, the group was joined by Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins, Suffolk County House of Correction Superintendent and Special Sheriff Yolanda Smith, Suffolk County Jail Superintendent Michael Colwell, and Assistant Superintendent Rachelle Steinberg for the presentation.

The vaccine rollout to jails and prisons in Massachusetts was enacted in accordance with the phased distribution as outlined by the Department of Public Health, classifying correctional health care professionals alongside



their peers working in hospitals, community health centers and long-term care facilities. Members of the incarcerated population and correction officers were placed within the Phase One Priority, (D): Congregate Care, which includes both shelters and correctional institutions. Both inmates and correctional staff are being vaccinated concurrently.

“As we continue to practice strict health and safety protocols in our facilities to prevent and contain the contraction and spread of COVID-19, the distribution of vaccinations to our staff and those in our care and custody is absolutely critical to these efforts,” said Sheriff Tompkins. “Unfortunately, due to our nation’s checkered past of scientific and medical experimentation on communities of color, often in violation of their most basic human rights, there is, understandably, a healthy mistrust among Black and Brown people with respect to government-sponsored health programs.

“That’s why it is so important to have representatives from our communities come in to speak with our population, which is disproportionately made up of people of color, to help assuage any concerns they might have about taking this immensely important step forward in the battle against the pandemic.”





Holding three sessions each at the House of Correction and Jail, the group began the presentations with a short video about the “Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male,” a study conducted in 1932 by the United States Public Health Service that involved 600 Black men, 399 of whom had cases of syphilis, which took place without their informed consent. While the study ultimately resulted in a cure for the disease, the men in the study were unaware that they were test subjects, poorly compensated for the role that they played in it, and never treated for the disease themselves. Ultimately, 128 of the men in the study died of syphilis or its complications, with 40 of their wives being infected and 19 of their children acquiring congenital syphilis. This deceptive and deadly study, was but one of many instances in which people of color would be misled and mistreated by the U.S. government, engendering a lasting mistrust of government-sponsored medical programs among some in communities of color.

“I know that some of you have thought, ‘Oh, they’re here to test the vaccine on us. We’re like Guinea Pigs,’ but that’s not the case,” said Reverend Liz Walker, opening the discussion. “We wanted to advocate for you to have this vaccine to protect you because you’re living in close quarters and this virus is so easily spread. We want you to be safe and we want your families to be safe once you come out.”

“We’re here, first and foremost, to tell you that you are loved and that you matter,” said Reverend Dr. Gloria Hammond White. “I’ve seen, personally, so many people who have been so very sick with COVID-19. So many people have died from it, and we need you to be safe because your story is still being written. You have good left to do.”

Speaking to questions about FDA (Food and Drug Administration) approval vs. Emergency Use Authorization, side-effects and potential dangers of vaccination, COVID-19 re-infection, the lasting effects of the virus, and a host of others, the doctors on the panel provided substantive information to the groups in attendance.

“I don’t want you to not get this vaccination because it’s not FDA-approved,” said Dr. Wurcel, who also consults with several of the Massachusetts Sheriff’s offices. “The difference here with FDA approval and Emergency Use Authorization really is about paper work. We know that it seems fast with ‘Operation Warp Speed,’ but these vaccines have been studied and clinical trials have been done, and we have data that says that the vaccines are safe.”

“We’re here to strongly encourage you to take the vaccine because we’ve seen the devastation that this virus has caused, particularly in communities of color,” added Dr. Chandler. “We know that the vaccines are safe, they’re effective and the alternative of going without is just too dangerous for you, your families and our communities.”

By the end of the sessions, many of the participants appeared to be receptive to the message.

“Look,” said one of the participants, “just take the vaccine. I mean, it’s better to be safe than sorry, right? We do all these other things that are harmful to our bodies, but we’re worried about a little vaccine?”

To date, 244 inmates and detainees have taken the vaccine, and 516 staff members have also received it.



SUFFOLK COUNTY BEGINS DISTRIBUTION OF COVID-19 VACCINE TO INCARCERATED POPULATION AND CORRECTION STAFF

Vaccine Dissemination Part of Plan for All Massachusetts Correctional Facilities

As distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine continues to ramp up across the nation, the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department, along with the other Massachusetts County Sheriff's Departments, began the process of inoculating the incarcerated individuals in their custody along with members of the correctional staff.

Starting on Jan. 18, correctional facilities began their part of the vaccination plan for congregate care settings, in accordance with the timeline established by the Baker-Polito Administration and the Department of Public Health in consultation with the Massachusetts Vaccine Advisory Group. Members of the incarcerated population and correctional officers were placed within the Phase One Priority, (D): Congregate Care, which includes both shelters and correctional institutions. Both inmates and correctional staff are being vaccinated concurrently.

"We have been working diligently in collaboration with the Baker Administration, the Department of Public Health, the Vaccine Advisory Group and our resident infectious disease specialist Dr. Alysse Wurcel to insure that we continue to be fully prepared for this crucial step," said newly-elected President of the Massachusetts Sheriff's Association

and Suffolk County Sheriff, Steven W. Tompkins. "Our mandate is for the safe custody and care of those remanded to us by the courts, but we also have a critical responsibility for the health and safety of the men and women who deliver on that mandate. These vaccinations protect both our incarcerated populations and the people who oversee their safety, which ultimately protects the health and safety of the general public."

Hampden County Sheriff Nick Cocchi, the new vice president of the MSA, said he is hopeful that the rollout of the vaccine to congregate care settings in Massachusetts will mark a true turning point in the pandemic.

"I think it's important that correctional staff and the people in our care and custody are offered the COVID vaccine at the same time, not only from a medical standpoint to maximize immunity, but to build trust," Cocchi said. "The vaccine is the subject of some skepticism, but I am encouraged by the science. And I'm hopeful that our staff and the people whose health and safety we are responsible for will continue to be accepting of it through education and seeing others around them be inoculated."





Over the past several weeks, working closely with the Department of Public Health and in consultation with Dr. Wurcel, staff have prepared for the vaccination roll out. To date, nearly 1,000 health care professionals and COVID-facing staff have been vaccinated within the 14 Sheriffs' Offices in accordance with Phase One (A) as outlined by the Department of Public Health, classifying these correctional health care professionals alongside their peers working in hospitals, community health centers and long-term care facilities.

"In my discussions with my patients who are incarcerated, several people are interested in the vaccine, and others are interested but have questions," said Dr. Wurcel. "Even with all of the prevention, testing and mitigation strategies in place, people who are in jail and

prison represent one of the highest risk populations. I am excited to work closely with the sheriffs [in the] equitable roll-out of the vaccine to their staff and all of the people in custody."

While the FDA has issued emergency use authorizations for both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, correctional facilities have been receiving vaccines from Moderna, which is headquartered in Cambridge with a production facility in Norwood.

Vaccination of incarcerated individuals and correctional staff will continue, with education around the benefits and risks of the vaccine, to be offered to new inmates and staff as requested.

SUFFOLK COUNTY SHERIFF STEVEN W. TOMPKINS ELECTED TO SERVE AS PRESIDENT OF MASSACHUSETTS SHERIFF'S ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

Hampden County Sheriff Nick Cocchi Elected Vice President

Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins and Hampden County Sheriff Nick Cocchi have been elected by their fellow county sheriffs to serve, respectively, as President and Vice President of the Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association (MSA).

This marks a return to the position that Sheriff Tompkins previously held back in 2015, and it is the first time that Sheriff Cocchi has been elected to serve the organization. Both positions carry a two-year term of service. Sheriff Tompkins and Sheriff Cocchi take the helm from outgoing President Middlesex County Sheriff Peter Koutoujian and outgoing Vice President Franklin County Sheriff Christopher Donelan.

"I am greatly honored to be chosen by my fellow sheriffs to once again represent the MSA in this capacity," said Sheriff Tompkins. "I believe that we are at a critical inflection point in the relationship between criminal justice and social justice, and I am very much looking forward to working with Sheriff Cocchi and MSA Executive Director Carrie Hill to not only expand on the progress that we're making in the delivery of the comprehensive services we provide for our populations, but to help drive corrections further forward in this way."

Sheriff Cocchi said he is excited to serve as vice president, and that he sees the position as an opportunity to advocate for enlightened and effective corrections at a time when law enforcement is under pressure and being judged by the bad actions of a few.

"I am eager to serve my brother sheriffs as an advocate for the important work we do, fighting for what is in the best interests of the people we all serve," Sheriff Cocchi said. "Right now, more than ever, law enforcement officials need to step up and not just do the right thing, but



speak on behalf of what is right. We play a significant part in the lives of our justice-involved population, and I'm honored to be able to advocate for their interests through the MSA."

Established 35 years ago, the Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association is comprised of the 14 duly-elected county sheriffs serving across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In their roles as MSA President and Vice President, Sheriff Tompkins and Sheriff Cocchi will work in concert with the MSA body and its strategic partners to better educate and inform their collective constituency about the important work that the county sheriffs are doing to advance and enhance programs and services that address behavioral health and substance use, women's programming, reentry services, LGBTQI-specific programming, and a host of others.

"As we enter the New Year, I am profoundly optimistic about the better days to come," said Sheriff Tompkins. "In my capacity as the incoming president of the MSA, I look forward to collaborating with everyone across the fourteen counties and beyond to make our communities safer, healthier and more vibrant."

PARTNER OF THE MONTH:

Dave Rini

Boston Area Rape Crisis Center



The Suffolk County Sheriff's Department's "Partner of the Month" series highlights the outside agencies and organizations that are working with us to help improve the lives and increase opportunities for the men and women remanded to our care and custody by the courts. Each month, we highlight these collaborations between our organizations and shed some light on some of the ways in which we are readying people to reenter their communities better prepared to provide for themselves and their families.

In this issue's installment of our "Partner of the Month" series, we feature Dave Rini who is the Incarcerated Survivor Support Program Manager for the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC). The Boston Area Rape Crisis Center was founded in 1973, and is the only comprehensive rape crisis center in the Greater Boston area, and the oldest and largest center of its kind in New England. Their mission is to end sexual violence through healing and social change. BARCC provides free, confidential support and services to survivors of sexual violence ages 12 and up, in addition to their families and friends. They work with survivors of all genders, and their goal is to empower survivors to heal and seek justice in ways that are meaningful to them.

When asked what other aspects make BARCC special besides being the oldest and largest such center in New England, Dave replied, "For a lot of people who have

been through sexual violence, the experience isn't a single moment in their life that they want help in overcoming – it can be a long journey to start feeling whole again. That journey can include a lot of struggles, some of which are mental and emotional, but others of which are much more concrete. Things like finding a safe place to live, figuring out how to get access to victim compensation funds, deciding how or whether to be involved with the criminal justice system are all challenges that many of the survivors we support will face. At BARCC, we can often help our clients with at least pieces of all of those things, and having that breadth is really important. In the Incarcerated Survivor Support Program, we've spent a lot of time working with reentry agencies in the community to make sure that once survivors who have worked with us inside a prison or jail are getting ready to head home, they still know how to get in touch with us and stay connected."

BARCC has been working with the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department since 2015, and has formed a bond with the men and women here. Dave stated, "We came into this work with the assumption that many of the women in custody at the House of Correction were dealing with some level of trauma, whether that was experiences of domestic violence, sexual violence, or other interpersonal violence or neglect. We thought that when we set up our hotline and mail programs, that the majority of our initial contacts would be with the women here, partially because

we assumed the number of survivors here would be high, but also because many men who have experienced this same kind of violence don't have a lot of cultural support for talking about it. What we found, though, was that we got about the same number of calls from men and women, and that the number of calls we got was a bit lower than what we expected. When we started doing our in-person classes with Women's Programming in 2018, though, that's when we saw a big difference. Being in-person, being able to build a little bit more trust with folks than we can just through the phone, we started to hear a lot more stories from the women, although we have special rules in place for our class to try to keep people from getting too distressed or sharing too much personal information in a space where we can't control who hears it. We hope the impact of those stories is that survivors feel a lot less alone than they might have before, when they realize how (unfortunately) widespread this type of violence is, and they realize how resilient they have been in their lives. For us, getting to work more directly with the survivors in the facility further cemented how important working with the population inside can be. And, to be fair, this isn't limited to just the women – we started a pilot workshop for some of the men in the Family Matters program right before COVID-19 forced us to work remotely, and we're expecting that being able to build that same kind of trust might result in similar kinds of stories.”



BARCC's Incarcerated Survivor Support Program (ISSP) is the department that runs all of their programs with survivors who are incarcerated. Right now, BARCC works with the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department, Norfolk County Sheriff's Office, and the Massachusetts Department of Correction. For survivors in custody with Suffolk County, BARCC has a couple of different ways that they can get in touch with BARCC: they can call on the free, confidential hotline any day of the year from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. at (844) 744-7732. They can call about anything related to sexual violence, not only PREA-related questions. A lot of survivors have experienced something traumatic before they get to the Sheriff's Department; they are welcome to call BARCC to talk about those things if they would like to. They can also send letters to: Incarcerated Survivor Support Program, BARCC, 99 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge, MA 02139, and BARCC will write them back. There are a lot of resources that they can send to people in the mail, from meditation and breathing techniques to help achieve calmness when they feel like things are out of control, to information about healing from trauma. Finally, Dave would like survivors to know that “when COVID-19 is not the same concern that it is now, we also look forward to getting back into the facility to continue running some of the workshops that we were previously running.”

For more information visit: www.barcc.org.

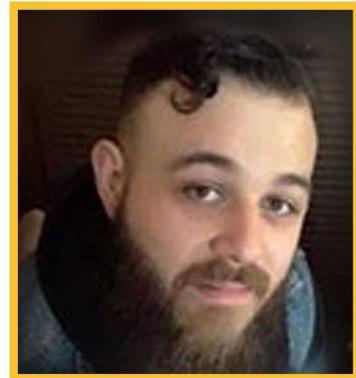
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OFFICER ANTHONY DIAZ

On January 1, 2021, Suffolk County Sheriff's Department Officer Anthony Diaz passed away suddenly and unexpectedly.

Officer Diaz, a six-year veteran at the Suffolk County House of Correction, was kind, funny, friendly, and a hard worker. Serving in the Department's Automotive Division, he was passionate about his avocation, eagerly sharing helpful advice with his colleagues about their cars.



Shortly after Officer Diaz joined us, a local police department came calling, offering him a position in their police academy, which he declined, stating that he had found his dream job at Suffolk County Sheriff's Department.

Anthony was held by many to be one of the young, up-and-coming officers representing the bright future of both our Department and the profession of corrections. We will all miss his smile, his upbeat personality and his dedication.

Officer Diaz left to mourn his brother and his mother.



NEW RECRUITS BEGIN JOURNEY TO BECOME OFFICERS IN COTA CLASS 21-01

This past January, the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department recently welcomed a new class of officer candidates to our Chelsea Correction Officer Training Academy (COTA).

Before serving at the Department, these correction officer recruits will undergo a rigorous academy complete with required training that includes: first responder CPR, ethics and professionalism, defensive tactics, report writing, suicide prevention, the use of force continuum, firearm safety and handling, inmate education and programming, contraband control, courtroom testimony, CORI and inmate rights and responsibilities, autism awareness, fire safety, sexual harassment, cross-gender supervision, and a host of other subjects.

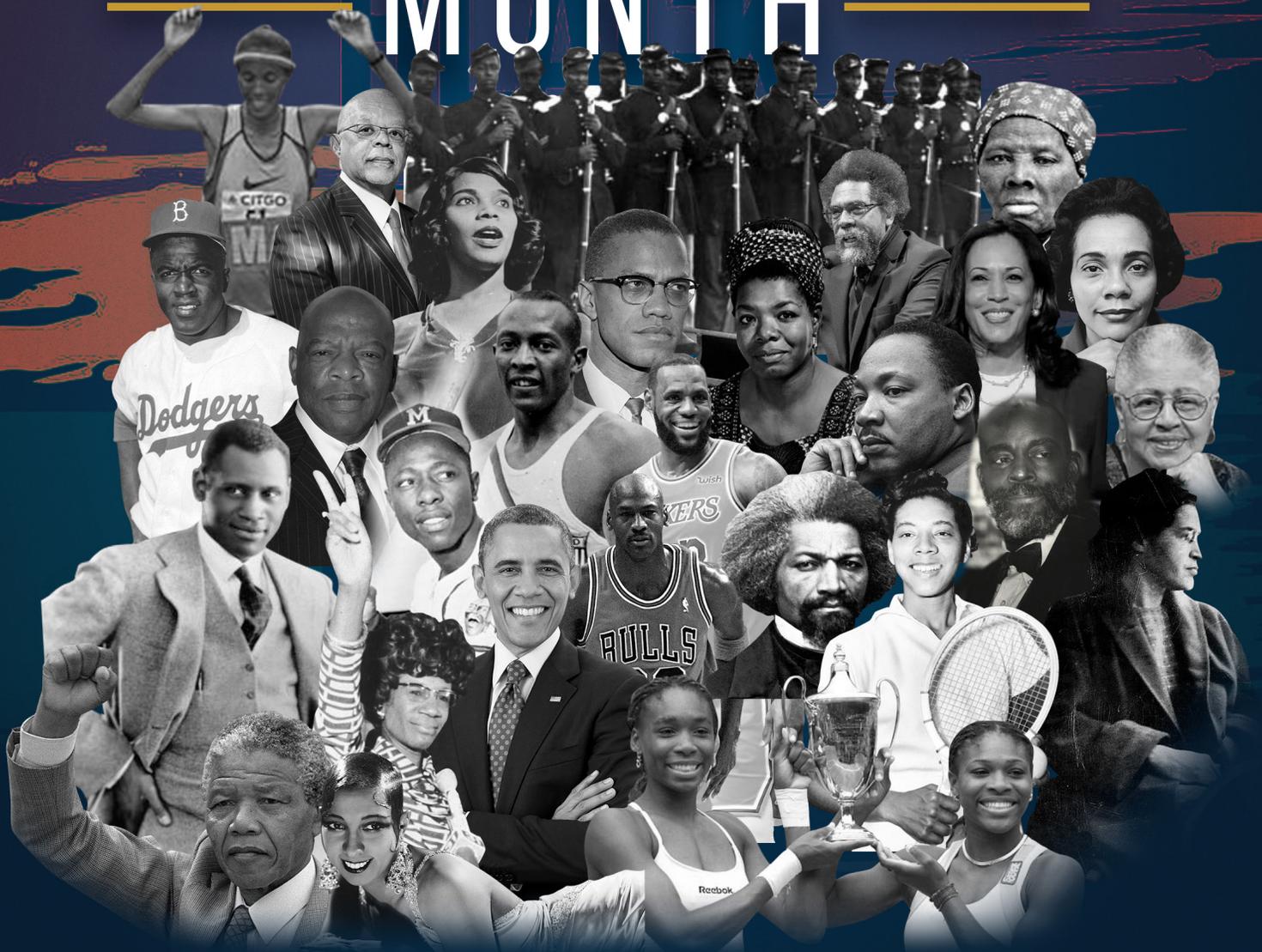
The thirteen-week academy will complete in April and we wish all the participants of COTA Class 21-01 patience, perseverance and success as they make their way to Graduation Day and the promise of a great career with the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department.





SHERIFF STEVEN W. TOMPKINS &
THE SUFFOLK COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

C E L E B R A T E
BLACK HISTORY
MONTH



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