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Waukesha County judge wants to decide which work-release inmates should stay home

Bruce Vielmetti, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Published 5:27 p.m. CT March 24, 2020 | Updated 6:49 a.m. CT March 25, 2020



Waukesha County Huber Facility (Photo: Google maps)

Waukesha County's chief judge has demanded that the sheriff supply her a list of all the inmates at the county's work-release center so she may calculate who might be more safely told to stay home.

Inmates with so-called Huber privileges get to leave their facility during the day to go to jobs, or school, treatments or to perform child or elder care before returning at night.

In an emergency order, Chief Judge Jennifer Dorow noted that having all those people leave the Huber center, go out into different places in the community and return, increases the chances of them introducing the coronavirus into the center, which housed about 107 inmates on Monday. The center is located at 1400 Northview Road in Waukesha.

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Live updates: [The latest on coronavirus in Wisconsin \(/story/news/2020/03/25/coronavirus-wisconsin-latest-updates-cases-cancellations/5076633002/\)](/story/news/2020/03/25/coronavirus-wisconsin-latest-updates-cases-cancellations/5076633002/)

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Daily digest: [What you need to know about coronavirus in Wisconsin \(/story/news/2020/03/09/coronavirus-wisconsin-current-numbers-and-latest-news/4997376002/\)](https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/2020/03/09/coronavirus-wisconsin-current-numbers-and-latest-news/4997376002/)

Some of the inmates may be more vulnerable to COVID-19 due to their age or pre-existing health conditions.

The order requires Waukesha County Sheriff Eric Severson to provide Dorow with a list of all the Huber inmates so she can decide which of them might be released on fulltime electronic monitoring, or just be released with suspended or time-served sentences.



**Waukesha County Circuit Court
Chief Judge Jennifer
Dorow** (Photo: Emily Hamer /
Wisconsin Center for Investigative
Journalism)

An assistant to Severson said he was not immediately available to discuss Dorow's order.

In the early days of the crisis, the state Department of Corrections took the opposite approach and canceled all work release, so inmates would not leave facilities at all.

Last year, for reasons unrelated to the current public health crisis, Milwaukee County [proposed moving nearly all its Huber inmates to electronic monitoring \(/story/news/crime/2019/10/01/electronic-house-arrest-would-save-county-1-7-million-house-correction-abele-says/3829585002/\)](https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/crime/2019/10/01/electronic-house-arrest-would-save-county-1-7-million-house-correction-abele-says/3829585002/) to save \$1.7 million a year by closing down dorms and reallocating staff.

The House of Correction in Franklin houses more than 1,000 people mostly serving misdemeanor sentences of under a year, or similar stays imposed as conditions of probation in a felony, and some state prisoners under a contract with the Department of Corrections. It offers various programming from education and job preparation to substance abuse assessment and counseling.

But it, too, was working to reduce its population to well under 1,000 in light of the increased risks of spreading the coronavirus in places where it is difficult or impossible to practice social distancing.



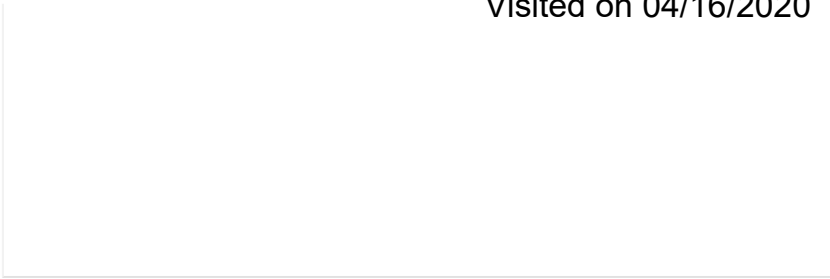
Inmate housing in the Frank Lotter building of the Milwaukee County House of Correction in Franklin, Wis. (Photo: Mark Hoffman, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

Wisconsin Community Services provides electronic monitoring of defendants and inmates to seven counties in southeastern Wisconsin. Executive Director Clarence Johnson said the mad scramble to reduce jail and prison populations ahead of COVID-19 has hit WCS, too.

"Exponential demand has maxed us out," he said Tuesday, adding that WCS is working with agencies to try to provide more remote monitoring. But WCS has its own capacity issues; its staff must not only keep track of the movements of clients "on a bracelet," but some are still required to have close contact with the inmates to install and remove the devices.

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