



**The Professional Trades Union for Prison,  
Correctional & Secure Psychiatric Workers**

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## **POA Circular 074/2020**

28<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Dear Colleagues

### **GENERAL SECRETARY UPDATE NUMBER 6 - COVID-19**

It is International Workers Memorial Day today 28<sup>th</sup> April 2020 and each year all around the world the trade union movement holds a minute silence at 11am to remember those who have lost their lives at work, or from work related injury and diseases. Workers Memorial Day is commemorated around the world and is officially recognised by the UK Government.

The theme for the Memorial Day this year is COVID-19 where so many workers including our colleagues have fallen. COVID-19 is indiscriminate as the pandemic affects every worker regardless of sector or locality. Tens of thousands of workers worldwide have died. More have fallen ill or continue to go to work risking their lives. POA members know only too well the risks that face them. Tragically six of our colleagues have died from the virus and many more are ill. Our thoughts and prayers go to their families as indeed do our thoughts and prayers go to the many prisoners that have also died from the virus.

It is pleasing that the CEO Jo Farrar and Director General Phil Cople support International Workers Memorial Day and today at 11am I ask that everyone stops work for one minute to commemorate our colleagues who have fallen and to others Internationally who have lost their lives. It is the first time that we can pay tribute to our colleagues and I think it is correct that we do.

The National Chairman Mark Fairhurst and myself had a further dial in as part of our regular meetings with the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State Robert Buckland QC and Prisons Minister Lucy Frazer QC on Monday evening (27<sup>th</sup> April 2020). The Ministers thanked the POA membership on behalf of themselves and the Prime Minister. The Ministers welcomed POA input and our continued collaborative approach with HMPPS and Government. They described our input as “critical and important during this pandemic” to ensure that our Prisons remain as safe as possible.

The POA NEC have always believed that we are part of the solution to enable good employee relations and will continue with a partnership approach to ensure our members safety and the safety of those in our care. Lots of issues were discussed including effective testing, PPE, Early Release Scheme, Temporary Accommodation, Workshops being used to make PPE under strict guidelines and finally Regime Discipline. I was pleased that the Ministers agreed with many of the points that the Chairman and myself raised on your behalf. I know at some stage there needs to be a discussion on a recovery plan.

The Ministers acknowledged that the POA would be at the heart of that discussion because it is complex and there are no easy solutions. There will still have to be regime discipline and good effective communications with those in our care and indeed their families. In society there is an expectation that at some stage there will be an easing off of restrictions in the coming weeks. Prisons are totally different and expectations will have to be managed with care and detailed discussions will take place with POA local officials and with the POA Nationally. In Justice Questions yesterday in the House of Commons the Secretary of State made clear to a question from an MP and he warned about the “danger of over-enthusiasm going ahead of guidance”. I welcome that intervention and clear statement that every Prison must adhere to the guidance and not place our POA members or indeed those in our care in danger from this virus. It is difficult enough without taking risks and endangering health and safety.

The POA will be at the heart of every discussion going forward and we will have regular dialogue with Ministers going forward along with the CEO Jo Farrar and Director General Phil Cople in relation to any recovery plan.

According to Ministry of Justice data which they have released on their website as of 17:00 hrs on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2020;

- 324 prisoners have tested positive for COVID-19 across 71 prisons;
- 296 prison staff have tested positive for COVID-19 across 59 prisons;
- 11 prisoner escort and custody services (PECS) staff have tested positive for COVID-19

It is clear that HMPPS and Immigration Services need to remain vigilant in the coming days, weeks and months. Social distancing is essential. HMPPS, Government, and POA recognise the need to continue with our collaborative approach to this pandemic and the way forward will be difficult but with the correct planning and dialogue progress can be achieved.

The Secretary of State also knows the fears and apprehension that our wonderful members have and he commended Center Parcs for their magnificent gesture in respect of POA members. In fact, I also have to pay tribute to them because initially they were going to charge a reduced rate of £20 per night which incidentally the POA Welfare Committee had agreed to fund but Center Parcs have now confirmed it will be free of charge to POA members. I also commend the National Chairman Mark Fairhurst in his dealings with the management of Center Parcs. So far in excess of 100 members and rising have taken advantage of this great offer.

The POA NEC also recognise the importance of everyday business on behalf of POA members and that is why our legal challenge as an interested party led by the FBU in respect of the Pension Cost Cap was launched recently. We recognised this was the most effective way to jointly pay for the legal challenge with 4 Unions sharing the cost which makes economic sense rather than having 4 separate legal challenges that are effectively the same. We believe Government should have passed on the savings in the cost cap thus making pension contributions less for our members by about 2 per cent if not more. This is a completely different legal challenge to the Pension Age Discrimination Claims.

Further information will be provided in due course regarding that issue along with any other updates on COVID-19 related issues. Once again thank you to our brave POA members, Local Branch Officials, NEC/FTOs and the POA support staff.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Gillan', with a small flourish at the end.

**STEVE GILLAN**  
General Secretary