



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

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POA Circular 063/2020

16th April 2020

Dear Colleagues

GENERAL SECRETARY UPDATE NO:4 – COVID-19

As I do my weekly update pertaining to COVID-19 it is with regret that yet another colleague at HMP Wymott Mr David Bentham has died and I am sure all our thoughts and prayers are with his family, friends and colleagues at this distressing time. I am also aware that more prisoners in our care have sadly died as well and again our thoughts and prayers are with their families and friends.

The Government will also be doing their assessment on the lockdown as they are required to do by the end of 16th April 2020. Once again, I commend brave POA members irrespective of where they work and irrespective of rank. The work that is being carried out under the pressures that you are working and all the dangers and uncertainty that inevitably brings during these unprecedented times is outstanding. POA members are often overlooked by the media and are not recognised for the work that is carried out in Prisons, Immigration Centres, Special Hospitals and In Country Escorting. I have no desire to say any worker is more important than any other worker or occupation because I respect all workers wherever they work. Keyworkers and Emergency Services come from all walks of life and each person should be valued for the work that they do. POA members are Emergency workers and Keyworkers there is no doubt about that and Employers and Government should be stating that clearly at every opportunity very publically. It is therefore pleasing that Center Parcs have recognised the value of POA members when an appeal was posted on social media by the National Chairman Mark Fairhurst on behalf of the POA asking for hotel chains to recognise our frontline key workers. They are offering subsidised accommodation for those of our members who are apprehensive about going home in case they pass the virus on to their loved ones. A truly magnificent gesture and the POA will also be looking through our welfare fund how we can assist those members who have responded to POA Circular 57/2020.

I have been made aware that companies in the Private Sector have not been treated the same by Treasury in respect of Payment Plus Bonus Schemes and are getting inferior payments to POA members in public sector establishments. There needs to be an urgent clarification on this issue to ensure all our members are being treated appropriately and today I have written to HMPPS to remedy this situation with Treasury Officials.

It would also appear that at Morton Hall along with Brook House and Tinsley House regime restrictions are not the same as HMPPS and the Home Office appear to have given different instructions which are not in keeping with Government guidelines or Public Health England. I have written to the Home Secretary seeking an urgent explanation and I stated much the same when being interviewed by SKY News (14th April 2020). The whole interview can be found on the POA website under our dedicated COVID-19 section. Although I have consistently repeated that the POA will continue to work collaboratively with Government Officials, HMPPS and all other Employers we have recognition rights with I will not be afraid to point out their shortcomings and seek immediate remedy.

COVID-19 knows no boundaries and the POA will continue to work at pace with HMPPS. The work is coming through thick and fast and I know our members are getting bombarded with policy decisions that we are trying to shape for your benefit. We will not always be directly on top of this because issues are moving so quickly and what might be right today may well not be right for tomorrow and we will keep working with the relevant employers, Cabinet Office and indeed Ministers to ensure your safety and the safety of those in our care.

The POA have at every opportunity stated the case for more PPE and testing of staff. It is paying off. I am not complacent about this, but Branch Officials are reporting to the NEC that PPE is available, however I also know there are geographical differences on that where it isn't so readily available and we will continue to push hard to ensure it is available everywhere. Testing is being rolled out and we understand over 700 Prison Staff have been tested. Clearly not enough and we will continue to push that important measure for our members.

HMPPS and POA have agreed a joint statement on COVID-19 and I am hoping that finally the signatures of the Director General Phil Copple, CEO Jo Farrar, National Chair Mark Fairhurst and myself can now be signed off so that our members can see there is a joint commitment to work together for the benefit of POA members, those in our care so that together we can come through these very challenging times.

Our POA members may need expert help to get through these difficult times and that is why POA Circular 59/2020 was promulgated recently regarding the POA stress line. Please do not suffer in silence. This is a professional service with access to the health assured portal if members prefer not to talk to someone. Please refer to the above Circular if you need professional help.

The Director General Phil Copple recently put out a message to staff as did the CEO Jo Farrar. I thank them both for doing so. In thanking our members and in general staff I was pleased that there was no sugar coating and that the Director General has indeed said things may get worse with this virus and sadly more individuals may die. That isn't him being alarmist or for that matter me being alarmist it could be a reality and that is why it is vital that no short cuts are taken when the regime is in lockdown. I cannot reiterate this enough. The temptation by some Managers to interpret the temporary regime in order to get more prisoners out of cell is not acceptable and dangerous at this time of restrictions. In the future there will need to be an exit plan but the POA will challenge at every level where breaches are taking place and non-compliance with social distancing.

Thank you to all POA members, Local Branch Officials and the NEC along with Full time Officers and support staff that work tirelessly for the POA.

Yours Sincerely

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

STEVE GILLAN
General Secretary