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MEDIA ALERT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COVID 19 Cases at Detention Center Central Continue to Rise

(CHARLOTTE, NC) – The number of residents at Mecklenburg County Detention Center-Central (MCDCC) with active cases of COVID-19 continues to rise since the current outbreak began with two residents housed on the 6th floor testing positive the week before Thanksgiving. There are currently 65 residents in custody with COVID-19 and an additional 255 residents housed in either Respiratory Isolation or Respiratory Quarantine because of potential exposures. Residents in Respiratory Isolation (positive, symptomatic, or deemed by medical providers to have experienced a significant risk of exposure) and Respiratory Quarantine (with a known, but less significant, exposure) are kept separate and apart from all others to mitigate potential spread among approximately 1,430 total residents in custody at MCDCC at this time. Residents in Respiratory Isolation and Respiratory Quarantine are not moved within the facility other than for safety or security concerns and, at the direction of local state and federal judges, not moved outside the facility for court appearances. Residents in Respiratory Isolation will often be tested for COVID-19 (when deemed appropriate by a medical provider) and will remain in Respiratory Isolation until either (a) they test negative, (b) a completed contact tracing rules out exposure, or (c) they are otherwise deemed by medical providers no longer to be contagious. Respiratory Quarantine is a “step-down” from Respiratory Isolation, where residents will remain for 14 consecutive days – including any days spent in Respiratory Isolation – from the time of last known exposure.

The vast majority of the residents in Respiratory Isolation and Respiratory Quarantine are asymptomatic, while a few in Respiratory Isolation with the virus are displaying minor symptoms. Only two of the 65 residents with COVID-19 are requiring infirmary care at this time, and none are near requiring hospitalization, though our Medical Director remains in close contact with both the local health department as well as providers at Atrium Health – CMC Main Hospital should circumstances change and the need to transfer a resident for acute care arise.

Contact tracing and analysis performed by MCSO and our contract healthcare provider Wellpath, Inc. suggests that the current outbreak was triggered by MCSO detention staff who worked shifts not knowing that they themselves were contagious with the virus. All staff (as well as visitors) are screened for fever, other symptoms, and potential exposures prior to being allowed to enter MCDCC, and staff are not permitted to work if they fail the screening. At present, 13 MCDCC detention staff are out of work and in quarantine at home having tested positive for COVID-19; a total of 58 detention staff have tested positive since the pandemic began.

Prior to the current spike of 65 active-positive cases, MCDCC experienced one other spike above 3 active-positive residents in custody at any one time: on July 27, 2020, we peaked at 48 active-positive residents, but by early August we were back down to 3 and remained with 3 or fewer active-positive residents – often with *zero* active-positive residents – for more than three months, until late November when the current outbreak began. Since the beginning of the pandemic MCDCC has had a total of 148 residents test positive for COVID-19. All 148, including the 65 who are active-positive now, have been well cared for by our expert medical personnel at MCDCC (none ever requiring hospitalization). While we are, not surprisingly, seeing a surge in positive residents as the pandemic continues to spread in the community outside MCDCC, MCSO – our staff and our contract medical providers – remain confident in our collective abilities to manage the pandemic even should the current number of active-positive residents in custody continue to climb.

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