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Jeff Zmuda, Secretary

Laura Kelly, Governor

To: Juvenile and Adult Facility Residents and Family Members

From: Jeff Zmuda, Secretary

Date: October 27, 2021

Re: Coronavirus and KDOC updates

Sadly, last week we lost Terry E. Echols Jr., a member of El Dorado's staff to a traffic accident. Terry was a Corrections Supervisor I and a member of the facility's Special Operations and Response Team. He was due to start a new job with the Topeka Parole Office at the end of this month. Terry began his career at Ellsworth Correctional Facility in July 2011, then transferred to EDCF in May 2014. Such a tragic loss reminds of the fragility of life, and we are keeping his family, friends and co-workers in our thoughts and prayers.

Over the past three days members of the Kansas Legislature's Joint Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice Oversight have devoted significant time to the study and consideration of challenges faced by our department. On Monday, members of the committee toured Lansing Correctional Facility, and this morning (Wednesday) they toured the Kansas Juvenile Corrections Complex.

During the Committee's meeting on Tuesday morning at the state house, we presented testimony addressing the topics of staffing challenges, wages, working conditions and facility plans. We greatly appreciate the commitment of the Kansas Legislature to work with us to improve our system, particularly in the areas of staffing. While we cannot guarantee or predict the outcome, there is recognition by legislators and by Governor Kelly that we must work together to find solutions to our current staff shortages and to other issues relating to staff recruitment and retention.

We are taking a great step forward on our Pathway for Success! KDOC will receive \$858,650 in grant funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to improve internet connectivity for distance education programs and behavioral health services at our adult correctional facilities. The grant provides funding to install the infrastructure for secure resident internet and Wi-Fi and purchase technology and software. These funds will expand access to education programs such as GED classes, career technical education programming and college classes. The grant also supports improvements in telemedicine access for residents to support mental health or the addiction recovery process.

Equipping our residents for success once they are released is an important part of our vision of Transforming Lives for the Safety of All. We create the best conditions for success when we provide support for gaining work/life skills, access to education, training and job experiences. Those who achieve and sustain a job with a livable wage are one-third less likely to return to prison within a three-year period. This is good for the resident and the resident's family, and good for our Kansas communities. We will continue to seek funding to support additional technology improvements and expansion, but we are excited about the opportunities this grant supports.