



# The FRAKES Files

20-22

**Director Scott R. Frakes**  
**December 2, 2020**

Dear NDCS Teammates,

One of the things my supervisor (Governor Ricketts) is exceptionally good at is recognition. He recognizes people both publicly and privately. He thanks individuals, teams, groups and fairly often, he recognizes us Nebraskans for the amazing things we do. His real gift is not how often he recognizes people, it is his sincerity when he acknowledges good work or exceptional performance. It is not difficult to recognize someone. What makes it challenging is doing it in a way that makes the recipient feel honored and appreciated. Governor Ricketts makes it look easy. It is a skill I admire and continue to work on.

The last nine months have taken a toll on all of you, and this agency. Quarantines, isolation, sick co-workers, vacant posts, risk of infection, emergency work schedules, overtime, and constant change have been your “new normal.” Throughout all of this you have continued to adapt, support each other, find solutions, and get the job done. To make it even more interesting, very little of the regular work you have always done has gone away. The securing, feeding, clothing, counting, classifying, treating, educating, and supervising of inmates – these are all things you must do 24/7, pandemic or no pandemic. I often use the analogy of trying to change a flat tire on a bus that is headed down the freeway at 70 mph. You never have the option to just stop by the side of the road, catch your breath, and wait for AAA. You hang out the window by your toes, slap on the new tire, and stay headed in the right direction. Your “normal” would be considered amazing in almost any other line of work.

Many Nebraska state agencies have done incredible work since the beginning of the pandemic, but few others have had to deal with challenges presented to NDCS. I could not have predicted that the last few years of my corrections career would include managing a virus. My good fortune is that I am surrounded by all of you. When you are blessed with a team that makes the biggest challenges look simple, it is easy to lead. If I can get you the tools and resources you need, and then stay out of your way, I know the job will get done. Thank you for your commitment, ceaseless efforts, and willingness to help each other get the job done.

One of the biggest challenges is communicating the numerous changes that are occurring as you deal with the constantly evolving world of COVID-19. Broad, general communication is fairly easy to broadcast across an organization. It is the small technical details that can be much more difficult to communicate. This is especially true for all the staff members who are working at the line level, providing direct services to inmates. To do your jobs well, you need to know a lot of details. Despite excellent efforts to get information in the hands of everyone that needs to know, there will be communication breakdowns. This is one area where we can channel our frustration into understanding, compassion, and ultimately, better communication. If you do not have the information you need to do your job, ask questions and get the answers you need. I understand that inmates can be demanding and very impatient. Don't ever hesitate to say, “I don't know, but as soon as I find out, I will let you know.” That answer will not satisfy everyone, but if you follow through when you get the answer, you will build respect.

With two different vaccines about to be made available, the threat of COVID-19 should be reduced by next summer. Our lives will be different than they were last February, but much safer and less restrictive than today. You have done an excellent job of getting us this far, and you have become experts at managing COVID-19 within prisons. A front page story published in the November 30, 2020 *Omaha World Herald* referenced that success saying in part, "Nebraska ranks in the bottom five in total infections among inmates and in the bottom 12 for its infection rate." We knew from the beginning that we could not keep the virus out of NDCS. Our true success would be measured by controlling the rate of spread, and the quality of care provided to those infected. You have excelled in both measures.

As of today, there have been 343 NDCS team members testing positive for COVID-19, with 111 currently positive. While many teammates have been asymptomatic, many others have experienced serious symptoms from the virus. Please send your prayers, and good thoughts to all those fighting to recover. Stay safe, stay healthy, and once again – thank you for your service to NDCS and the citizens of Nebraska.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Frakes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Scott R. Frakes