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April 2, 2021

Sheriff Michael Downey
Kankakee County Sheriff's Office
3000 South Justice Way
Kankakee, Illinois 60901

Dear Sheriff Downey:

I write to inquire about how your department has coped with and handled concerns stemming from the Covid-19 epidemic as related to staff and detainees at Jerome Combs Detention Center.

From our previous communications, I understood that Combs, for the most part, avoided Covid-19 throughout much of the past year. However, in recent weeks I have learned from multiple sources of Covid-19 outbreaks in the jail, including a significant outbreak in the pod housing ICE detainees. As I recall from previous communications with your office, you were expecting to offer Covid-19 vaccinations in February to all inmates who requested one. I am curious if that happened. Could you please share with me in detail 1) the numbers of confirmed Covid-19 cases in Combs among all detainees, ICE detainees, and staff; and, 2) the numbers of detainees, ICE detainees, and staff who have been vaccinated. If vaccinations have not begun, when do you expect to start vaccinating staff and detainees?

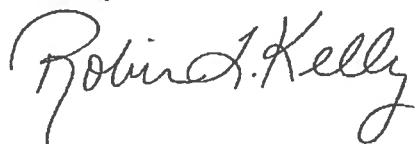
Additionally, I have received reports of other concerns regarding living conditions inside Combs. The concerns include the lack of mask-wearing and social distancing protocols, availability of masks, hand sanitizer and Covid-19 testing, and transparency in reporting Covid-19 cases to detainees. Other concerns have been raised about fungus and worms found inside the building, and a general lack of access to fresh air, sun light and recreational activities.

Covid-19 has created stress and complications in all walks of life, and I can only imagine those created in places such as detention centers. Please know that the newly enacted American Rescue Plan will provide badly needed resources to directly aid states and local governments which have been negatively impacted by Covid-19. I hope those resources will help address these concerns.

Page 2

I look forward to continuing to work together as we all address these unprecedented, complicated and difficult times. Thanks for your assistance and continued public service. If I can be of assistance to your department, or if you have any questions, please contact me or my senior adviser, Rick Bryant, at 708-679-0078.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin L. Kelly". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Robin" on the top line and "L. Kelly" on the bottom line.

Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress

cc: Kankakee County Board Chairman Andrew Wheeler