

**NATIONAL SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION**

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# **COVID-19**

## **COORDINATION**

### **CELL AFTER-**

### **ACTION REPORT**

**PREPARED BY**

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**SEPTEMBER 2020**




# FORMATION

As the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic began severely impacting sheriffs' offices around the nation, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) received a proposal from the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) to establish the NSA COVID-19 Coordination Cell.

The proposal outlined its objectives as follows:

*"NSA hereby requests funding to assist sheriffs, jail administrators, and the entire public safety field prepare for and respond to COVID-19 in their communities and jails. During the proposed six-month funding period, NSA will:*

1. **Employ** a full-time adviser to serve as the immediate point of contact and technical assistance/referral provider for all inquiries involving COVID-19;
2. **Collect, examine, and collate** all pertinent resources to make easily accessible on NSA's website as an information clearinghouse;
3. **Host** teleconference calls (2-3 times per week), open to sheriffs, jail administrators, and other law enforcement officials, to provide updates and Q&A sessions;
4. **Conduct** webinars for experts in the field to provide updates and best practices;
5. **Market and widely disseminate** information from NSA's clearinghouse website."



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**AMERICA'S SHERIFFS  
ARE TRUSTED SOURCES  
OF INFORMATION IN  
THEIR COMMUNITIES,  
SERVING VARIOUS  
FUNCTIONS DURING A  
PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS**

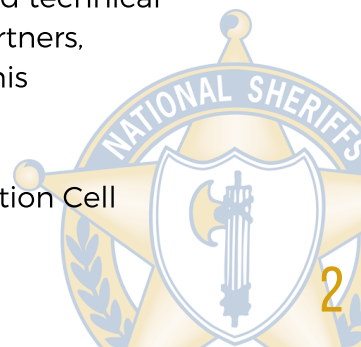
# FORMATION CONTINUED

America's sheriffs are trusted sources of information in their communities, serving various functions during a public health crisis like COVID-19, including enforcing public health orders, securing contaminated areas, investigating scenes of possible contamination, and protecting any resources, supplies, or equipment that may be needed to help diagnose and treat contaminated individuals. Sheriffs also have the additional responsibility of operating the nation's jails and those housed within.

Because of this, it is important that our nation's sheriffs have access to the most up-to-date and relevant COVID-19 information. NSA was, and remains, well-positioned to serve as an information source of actionable information for sheriffs, jail administrators, and other law enforcement personnel.

On March 15, 2020, this project was partially funded by the COPS Office through the Collaborative Reform Initiative for Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC). CRI-TAC provides customizable technical assistance to the field and this project is an example of rapid technical assistance. NSA and nine partners, including IACP, are part of this collaborative effort.

The NSA COVID-19 Coordination Cell ended July 15, 2020.



# WHO WAS INVOLVED

**NSA COVID-19 Coordination Cell**  
Members included:

**Sheriff Dave Mahoney:** Sheriff Mahoney is currently serving as NSA President and his third term as Dane County (WI) Sheriff. He was first elected in November 2006 to become the 52nd Dane County Sheriff. Sheriff Mahoney has been a professional law enforcement officer for 38 years. Thirty-seven years of his law enforcement career have been with the Dane County Sheriff's Office where he has worked in Security Services (Jail), Support Services, and Field Services (Patrol) (Detective) divisions.

**Sheriff Paul Laney (ret.):** Mr. Laney served in the United States Marine Corps for four years, joining the Fargo Police Department in 1989, serving as a patrol officer, gang/narcotics investigator, and commander of the Red River Valley SWAT Team. Mr. Laney served three terms as Cass County (ND) Sheriff, serving on the Board of Directors for the Dakota Territory Sheriff's Association, the North Dakota Sheriff's and Deputies Association and the National Sheriffs' Association. Mr. Laney was named the E911 Institutes "Government Leader of the Year" for 2011 and the National Sheriffs' Association's 2012 Ferris E. Lucas "National Sheriff of the Year."

**Jim Franklin:** Mr. Franklin has served as the Executive Director for the Minnesota Sheriffs Association. His career spans over 50 years of public safety service specializing in law enforcement, fire and emergency service operations. He has also served 13 years as an elected school board member for the Orono School District in Minnesota.

**Steve Casey:** Mr. Casey was appointed as Executive Director of the Florida Sheriffs Association in February 2010. Prior to his appointment, he

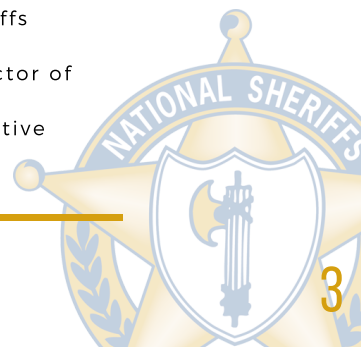
served as the FSA Assistant Executive Director for Operations. He retired from law enforcement in June 2009 after 30 years of service working at the city, county and state levels.

**Jonathan Thompson:** Mr. Thompson is the Executive Director and CEO of the National Sheriffs' Association. From 2007-2009, Mr. Thompson was the Director of External Affairs for the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency. Mr. Thompson was previously Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs.

**Dr. Marc Stern:** Dr. Stern is an internal medicine physician specializing in correctional health care. He has served as medical director for county and state correctional departments and currently teaches, does research, and provides expert consultation to federal, state, and local agencies.

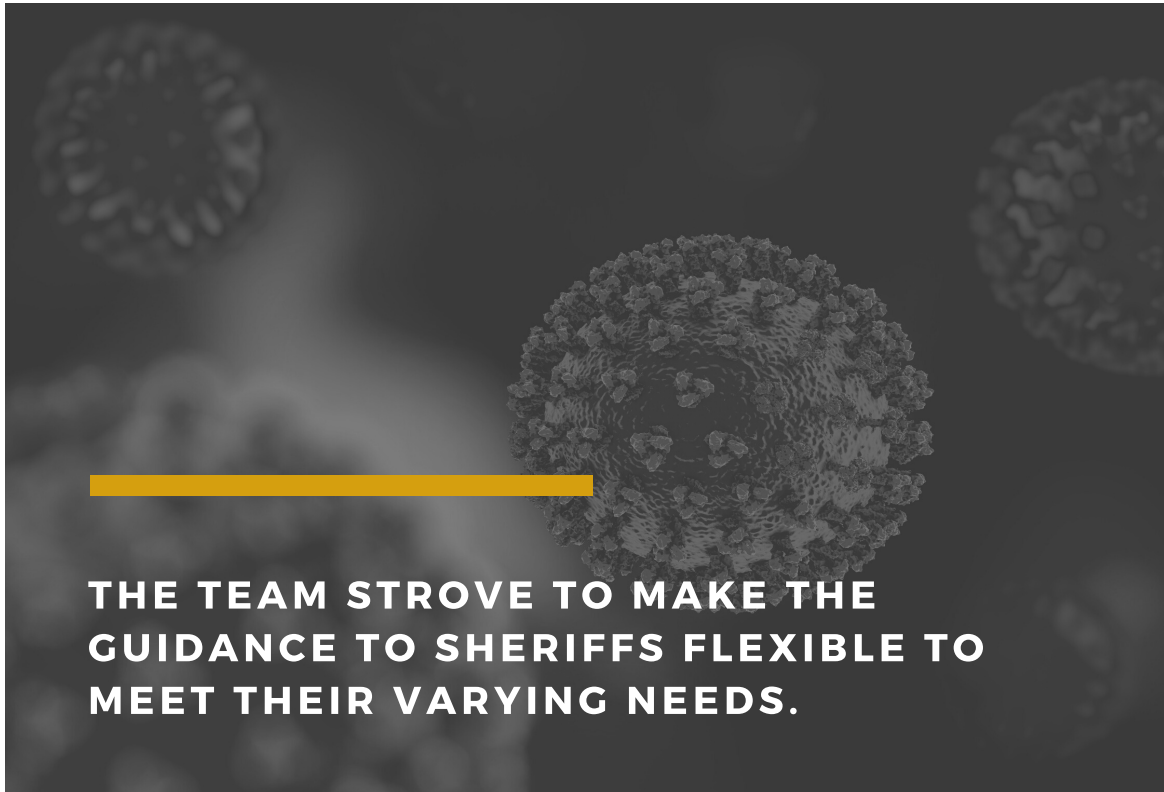
## OTHERS INVOLVED

- **Kristi Barksdale:** NSA, Project Manager
- **John Blount:** NSA, Government Affairs
- **Mike Brown:** NSA, Director of Professional Development
- **Matt Dunagan:** Florida Sheriffs Association, Deputy Director of Operations
- **Carrie Hill:** Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association, Executive Director
- **Lindsey Hopkins:** NSA, Sponsorship & Partnership Sales Manager
- **Dr. Steven Hougland:** Florida Sheriffs Association, Research Coordinator
- **Mark Pfeifle:** NSA, Consultant
- **Chelsea Rider:** NSA, Communications and Marketing Specialist
- **Patrick Royal:** NSA, Public Information Officer
- **Nanette Schimpf:** Florida Sheriffs Association, Consultant
- **Jessica Vanderpool:** NSA, Director of Grants and Contracts
- **Tim Woods:** NSA, Deputy Executive Director and COO





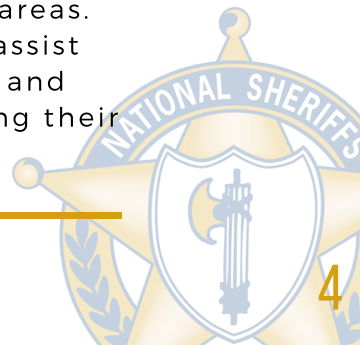
# DECISION MAKING IN THE CELL



The cell's decision-making structure was streamlined to allow for the fastest and most accurate decisions and approvals for activities. A **three-person immediate-signoff committee** included: 1) Team coordinator (Paul Laney and later Jim Franklin), 2) NSA Executive Director/CEO Jonathan Thompson and 3) An executive from a large state association, Florida Sheriffs Association Executive Director Steve Casey. The three were **accessible 24/7**

via email or conference call to methodically discuss and quickly make decisions to assist sheriffs.

The team strove to make the guidance to sheriffs flexible to meet the needs of various counties based on land mass; impacts of COVID-19 in the area; and population and socioeconomic differences in rural, suburban, or urban areas. The team also worked to assist both experienced sheriffs and newer sheriffs in protecting their citizens.



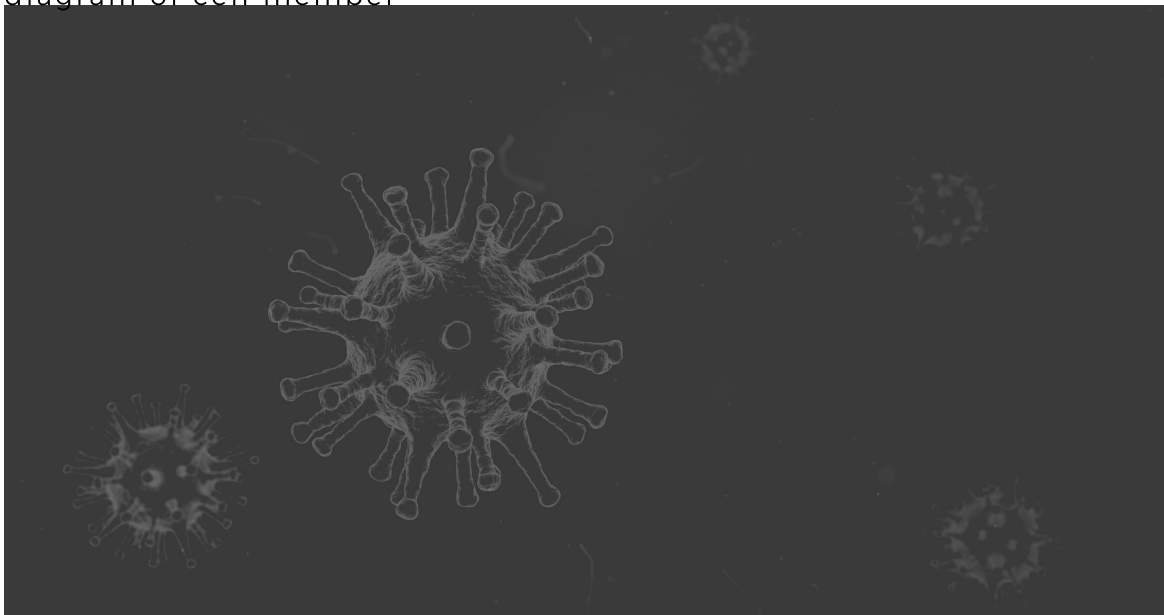
# DECISION MAKING CONTINUED

The cell's primary conduit for internal communication was phone or video conferencing, with daily meetings initially, followed by weekly meetings after a period of continuity was established and the number of urgent matters requiring immediate resolution decreased.

The daily video conferences assisted in monitoring COVID-19 activities, **sharing** information, **assigning** projects, **receiving** workgroup feedback, **identifying** and **acting** on tasks, and **finding** gaps in policies or recommendations. The conference calls were also used for developing messages and factual materials that informed sheriffs and state sheriffs' association executives. A diagram of cell member

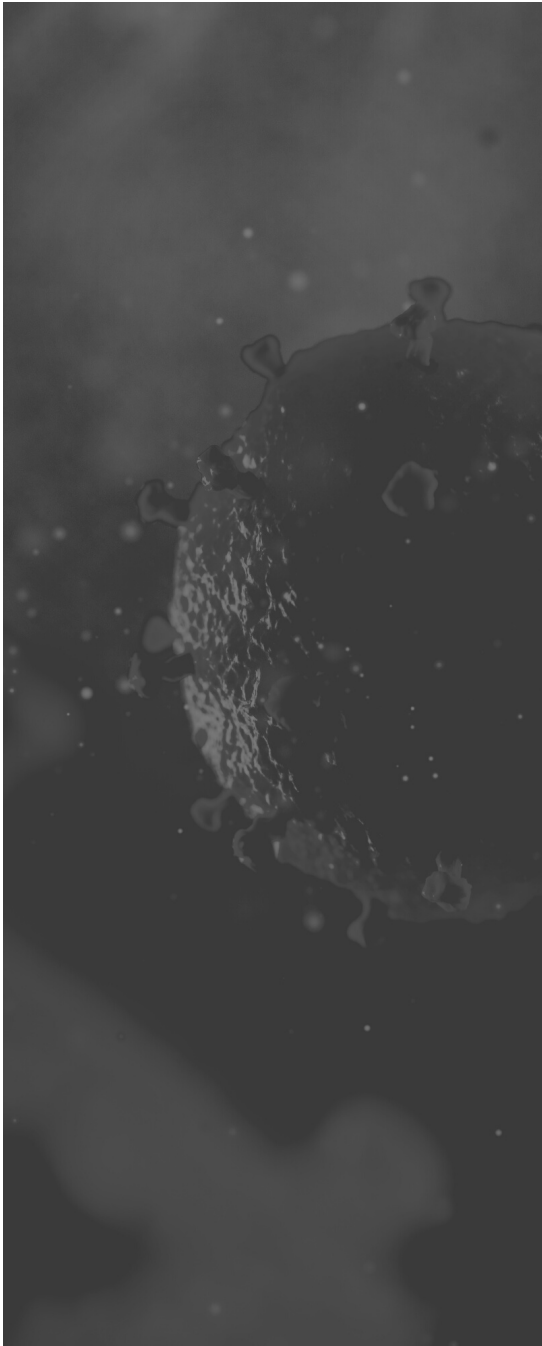
responsibilities allowed all participants to quickly decode leaders and responsibilities in diverse workgroups, such as legal, legislative, patrol operations, media operations, jail operations, and PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) supply.

Additionally, the cell communicated continuously with the 42 state sheriffs' associations on **weekly conference calls**, beginning March 25, 2020 and ending July 15, 2020. The calls featured subject matter experts and highlighted specific states for virus response updates. The cell also communicated with the state associations through **action alerts** sent out by cell leader Steve Casey.



# WHAT WORKED WELL

## AND WHAT DID NOT

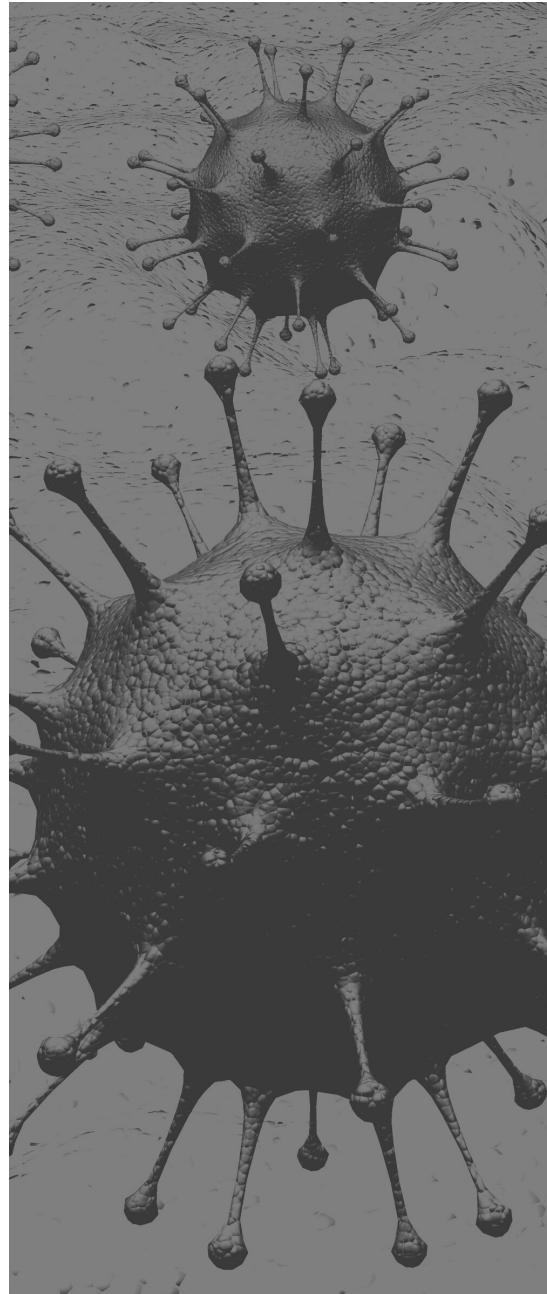


- The **state sheriffs' associations weekly conference calls** worked well in creating a dialogue among individuals states and from states to Washington, DC officials. Also, featuring subject matter experts from the field made virus updates impactful and useful.
- The cell's **patrol operations workgroup** was essential to the effort's success, handling multiple, complex issues that arose in the field. This group included sheriffs and state sheriffs' association executive directors from across the country. They met daily via telephone conference call to discuss and produce guidance on PPE reuse, handling possible or confirmed COVID exposed individuals by deputies, and deciphering lengthy government guidance into more digestible information for sheriffs and staff in the field. Topics included: guidance on what governors' stay-at-home/shelter-in-place orders mean for sheriffs' responsibilities in their communities; handling PPE shortages; and dealing with unrest arising from the closure of businesses, public parks, and beaches.

# WHAT WORKED WELL...

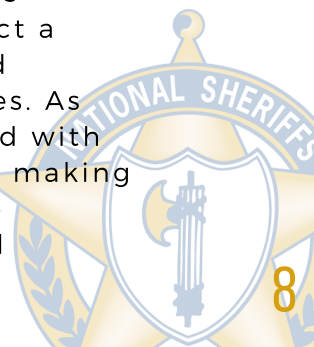
## CONTINUED

- The cell experienced **time-management challenges** as they staffed and deconflicted multiple conference calls with officials from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), DOJ, CDC, FEMA, the White House Coronavirus Task Force, and various state, local, and trade group affiliates. Many of these calls were essential and helpful, while others were less so. But only by participating in the calls were cell leaders able to discern which calls were worthwhile and provide actionable information to disseminate widely.
- A **speaker's bureau of more than 20 sheriffs** from across the country was assembled quickly and sheriffs were made available to speak with media. This worked well and permitted the cell to quickly inform the public.



# LESSONS LEARNED

- The inclusion of Dr. Marc Stern as NSA COVID-19 medical advisor allowed the cell to receive extraordinarily helpful daily advice and expertise on a variety of multifaceted medical issues. His coordination directly with the CDC on jail guidelines and on prioritizing PPE to protect detention officers and incarcerated individuals in jails was invaluable. For future emergencies, **a seasoned and effective medical professional with corrections/jail experience, such as Dr. Stern, must be involved** in a cell early and given wide authority to participate and impact the system to achieve success.
- In addition, future cells must **fully and immediately integrate mental health experts into the emergency process** to assist efforts on the ground. The cell relied on several mental health professionals for assistance over time. It did not come together perfectly but settled into good rapport and the cell achieved goals in providing actionable mental health information.
- The **jail operations workgroup needed at least one more team member** involved as COVID-19 continued to adversely impact a large number of incarcerated individuals and jail employees. As the group became overloaded with responsibilities ranging from making medically-based decisions to navigating complicated legal





# LESSONS LEARNED CONTINUED

questions, such as early release or downsizing jail populations, this enormous challenge had to be addressed in real time.

- The coordination cell system must **start early and get ahead of the curve**. The NSA must have a team ready before crisis happens and test it regularly with scenarios and defined responsibilities to hit the ground running for when, not if, the next crisis happens.
- George Floyd's death in Minneapolis in May 2020 required the cell's partial focus to also include member questions and requests on protests and riots in conjunction with the COVID-19 response. **Future cells must be prepared to navigate multiple difficult and time-consuming challenges simultaneously**. The cell demonstrated the ability to adjust to the changing environment and aid law enforcement as requested.
- The structure for decision making and leadership - 1) Mahoney/Thompson, 2) Casey and 3) Laney/Franklin - ensured that all voices were **heard and considered**, and that **fast and scrupulous decisions** were completed to avoid process stagnation.





# LESSONS LEARNED CONTINUED

- **Daily video conferencing** was important to allow all participants to see each other, achieve consensus, and create positive team ethos.
- The CDC was overwhelmed with activities. Though the cell worked collaboratively with the CDC to get guidance to jail administrators – ultimately, there was a lack of speed from the CDC on corrections-based recommendations. Therefore, it is essential that **cell members have strong relationships with organization employees**, like CDC officials. This was essential to assisting in the creation and implementation of NSA's jail recommendations.
- The cell must **focus significant resources on innovative and persuasive activities** to provide equipment to personnel in the field. For example, the cell worked extensively with FEMA, HHS, and individual states to re-prioritize first responders in the PPE distribution process. Much of our time was spent negotiating with federal and state officials to get desperately needed PPE to law enforcement.
- Although outside the scope of control, **CDC should have a standing Correctional Group** that anticipates how diseases might impact correctional and detention facilities and could launch into action sooner.



# ACCOMPLISHMENTS & DELIVERABLES

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**THE NSA COVID-19 COORDINATION CELL WORKED TOGETHER TO ACCOMPLISH AND DELIVER THE FOLLOWING:**

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## **QUESTIONNAIRES**

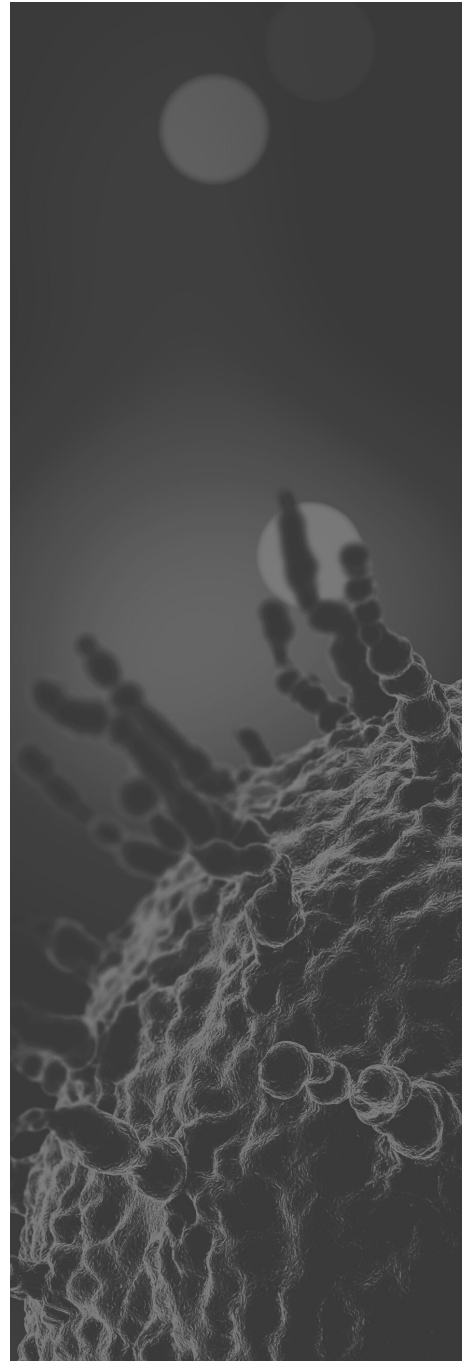
*(NOT CRI-TAC FUNDED)*

The NSA Cell utilized the services of the Florida Sheriffs Association to complete 10 weekly questionnaires of sheriffs to determine the current state of PPE supplies in their communities, which were used to inform federal and state leaders on their need to have resources moved into the appropriate areas. The data was utilized by FEMA to supply PPE to the field.

## **FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE ACT (FMLA)**

*(NOT CRI-TAC FUNDED)*

The NSA Cell worked collaboratively with the U.S. Department of Labor to ensure that provisions of the Family Medical Leave Act would be implemented to not negatively affect the operation of sheriffs' offices around the nation.



## ACCOMPLISHMENTS & DELIVERABLES CONTINUED

### **REAL-TIME EMAIL UPDATES**

From March 6, 2020, to July 15, 2020, Florida Sheriffs Association Executive Director Casey kept all 42 state sheriffs' association updated with actionable and factual information, including disseminating 257 real-time email updates.

### **STAFFORD ACT WEBINAR**

The NSA Cell produced a webinar, attended by over 400 sheriffs and other law enforcement professionals, on "The Stafford Act & Other Funding Resources" to guide sheriffs and staff through the federal grant process.

Presenters included:

- Alejandro Mayorkas, Partner, Wilmer Hale, and former Deputy Secretary, DHS;
- Mike Costigan, Acting Director, BJA;
- Tracey Trautman, Principal Deputy Director, BJA;
- Phil E. Keith, Director, COPS Office;
- Thomas Robinson, Public Assistance Field Instructor, FEMA; and
- Tom Wheeler, former General Counsel, NSA

### **COVID-19 SCAM INFOGRAPHICS**

The NSA Cell produced four COVID-19 information graphics on fraudulent activities, transmitting them to state associations and partners. The graphics reached an

audience of approximately 94,000 people on NSA's Facebook and 23,000 on NSA's Twitter.

### **COVID-19 LANDING PAGE**

The NSA Cell initiated a COVID-19 landing page on the NSA's website, sheriffs.org, beginning on March 3, 2020, and updated it almost daily with actionable and real-time information. From March 1, 2020 through July 31, 2020 the page was viewed nearly 20,000 times.

### **UPDATED GUIDELINES**

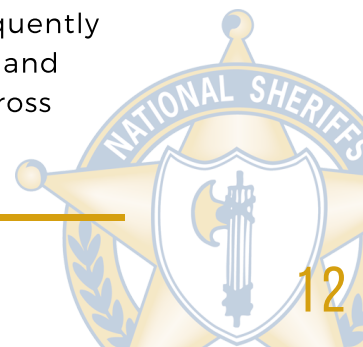
*(PARTIALLY CRI-TAC FUNDED)*

The NSA Cell's Patrol Committee produced updated guidelines on the [Updated Dallas Protocol on Exposure Guidelines](#), [Guidance for PPE Reuse](#), and [Suggestions for Patrol and Corrections to Supplement Current CDC Guidelines](#).

### **PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*(NOT CRI-TAC FUNDED)*

The NSA Cell produced and distributed public service announcements (PSA) to encourage citizens to assist first responders with general support and with PPE, including country stars Chase Rice and Naomi and Wynonna Judd, actress Anjali Bhimani, and singer Pat Boone. The PSAs were viewed frequently on social media platforms and heard on radio stations across the nation.



## ACCOMPLISHMENTS & DELIVERABLES CONTINUED

### INDUSTRY ACTION TEAM

(NOT CRI-TAC FUNDED)

The NSA Cell launched the COVID-19 Industry Action Team on April 14, 2020, to organize private and nonprofit sectors to assist law enforcement and first responders in need of PPE. The action team partnered with REFORM Alliance to send more than 1.6 million free surgical masks to more than 1,500 counties in 43 states across the country. Additionally, NSA partnered with Motorola, SwabTek and Under Armour to send an additional 207,000 free masks to 709 sheriffs' offices; with Home Depot, Kimble's Food, Venture Global and a separate SwabTek program to donate another free 2,020 masks to 29 offices; and with Kimble's Food to provide 2,000 pairs of gloves to sheriffs in South Carolina and food to seven jails and sheriffs' offices in South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama.

### MEDIA REQUESTS

(NOT CRI-TAC FUNDED)

NSA public affairs responded to more than 100 media requests, including:

- *ABC News*, "Police implement sweeping policy changes to prepare for coronavirus spread" – Sheriff David Mahoney quoted;
- *The Washington Post*, "Prosecutors, defense attorneys press to release inmates, drop charges and thin jail population in response to the coronavirus" – Sheriff David Mahoney quoted;

- *USA Today*, "Local jails releasing hundreds of prisoners amid coronavirus fears, up from dozens just weeks ago" – Sheriff Daron Hall quoted; and
- *11 Alive News, Atlanta, GA*, "How law enforcement continues their work, while social distancing" – Sheriff Ira Edwards quoted.

### EFFECTIVE & CRITICAL GUIDELINES

The NSA Cell ensured the CDC developed effective and critical guidelines for law enforcement and jail operations.

### NEWS CLIPS

NSA distributed news clips featuring current media stories concerning COVID-19 in jails from March 19, 2020, to June 30, 2020, for a total of 75 days.



# FEEDBACK

VARIOUS PARTICIPANTS AND BENEFACTORS OF THE NSA COVID-19 COORDINATION CELL PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING FEEDBACK

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"When COVID-19 initially began to appear and spread through our country, there was little reliable information about the virus. There was confusion about how the virus was transmitted, how to best protect officers and citizens from the virus, and what protective health information could be shared with first responders. The Law Enforcement Patrol Workgroup, chaired by Waukesha County (WI) Sheriff Eric Severson, attempted to wade through the volumes of rapidly evolving data regarding the virus to determine recommendations for Sheriffs and law enforcement across the country. We were very mindful of the fact that the effort to combat a deadly virus could not trample upon Constitutional Rights. The group combined medical advice with legal opinions and common-sense approaches to offer consistent guidance to law enforcement agencies nationwide."

**Jarrod Bruder**

Executive Director, South Carolina Sheriffs' Association  
Member, Law Enforcement Patrol Operations Workgroup

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"As Chairman of the Committee of State Sheriffs Associations, it was critical when COVID-19 first flared to be able to coordinate information sharing across the country as the degree of impact varied from coast to coast. The calls allowed those being impacted to share valuable information in a timely manner to those that had yet to be impacted. The policy discussion, for local, state, and national officials, truly helped the nation's sheriffs stay informed and better prepared."

**Byron Oedekoven**

Executive Director, Wyoming Association of Sheriffs and Chiefs of Police





## FEEDBACK CONTINUED

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"I have read a lot of your emails coming from the National Sheriffs' Association. Thank you for all the updates. We reacted quickly to your correspondence and thanks for the info on the free mask as well. It helped our department financially."

**Unnamed Alabama Sheriff's Office Command Officer**

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"Sheriffs throughout the state (Minnesota) are looking for a source of information not only at the state level but what is happening across the country. Being connected with my colleagues at the national level has most definitely helped my sheriffs. Receiving, reviewing, and disseminating vetted material to the 87 sheriffs of Minnesota has been helpful."

**Bill Hutton**

Executive Director, Minnesota Sheriffs' Association

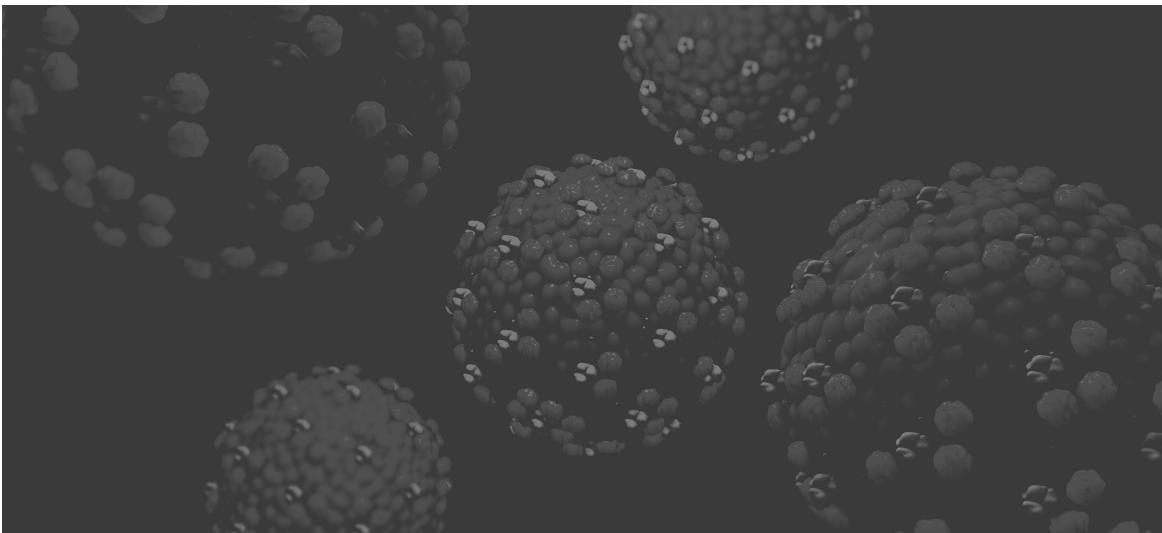
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"I spent three terms as a sheriff and know how hard something like COVID-19 can hit communities. Sheriffs need to know their needs for the field are being listened to and addressed, and this workgroup helps ensure that."

**Sheriff (ret.) Paul Laney**

NSA COVID-19 Coordination Cell Leader

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# ABOUT NSA



The National Sheriffs' Association is one of the largest associations of law enforcement professionals in the U.S., representing the more than 3,000 elected sheriffs across the nation, and with a total membership of more than 13,500. NSA is a non-profit organization dedicated to professionalism among sheriffs, their deputies, and others in the field of law enforcement, public safety, and criminal justice. Throughout its eighty-year history, NSA has also served as an information resource for all law enforcement, as well as state governments and the federal government.



## NSA COVID-19 COORDINATION CELL AFTER-ACTION REPORT

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Learn more about CRI-TAC at:  
<https://cops.usdoj.gov/collaborativereform>

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