

**WINNEBAGO COUNTY  
COURTHOUSE SECURITY COMMITTEE MEETING**

July 15, 2020 Minutes  
Noon

**Location: Zoom Meeting**

**Committee Members Present:** Judge Karen Seifert, Clerk of Courts Melissa Pingel, Sheriff John Matz, Victim Witness Coordinator Terri Vandellen, Facilities Director Mike Elder, District Court Administrator Jon Bellows, Emergency Management Director Linda Kollmann, Sheriff John Matz, District Attorney Christian Gossett, County Executive Mark Harris, State Public Defender Linda Meier, and Attorney Ed Jelinski

**Committee Members Not Present:** Attorney Rebecca Castonia, Lieutenant Bill Anthes, Family Court Commissioner Lisa Krueger, County Board Vice Chair Tom Egan, County Board Chair Shiloh Ramos

**Others Present:** Child Support Director Julie Mabry, Conflict Resolution Director Mike Rust, and Family Court Services Director Chris Demos

1. **April Meeting:** Judge Seifert noted that there was not a regular quarterly April meeting because of the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. **Minutes:** The committee members present approved the minutes from the last meeting from January 2020. Sheriff Matz moved to approve, seconded Attorney Jelinski, all approved.
3. **Opening Alternative Courthouse Entrances for Employees:** DA Gossett made a motion that the Courthouse Security Committee recommend separate employee entrances be opened in order to follow best practices for social distancing and protect the community and courthouse employees from Covid-19. DA Gossett said that when he was working on the (Winnebago) Courthouse Reopening Taskforce with the (Winnebago) County Health Director, the Health Director said separating people out is the best practice. The Winnebago County Judges said they did not have the authority to make that decision when they signed the Winnebago County Courthouse Reopening Plan into place.

DA Gossett indicated that it is the job of the Security Committee to keep people safe. Judge Seifert wanted to clarify the Judges' position on alternate entrances and said it was her understanding that this was an administrative decision that belonged to the County Executive. This issue has come up before in several different committees and no one seems to know or want to take responsibility for who has the authority to make the decision about who may enter the building without being screened.

The Judiciary & Public Safety Committee said screening was an Executive decision. County Executive Harris believes it is his decision, unless the County Board says otherwise. County Executive Harris also said that the Sheriff also has the authority over his employees and the County Executive does not have authority over the Sheriff or any of his staff, as he is an elected official.

County Executive Harris stated that a county "mask policy" was just sent out in that policy it states he is asking everyone to wear masks that are coming into the county buildings. He recommends

employees wear masks as they are coming into the building. He stated that presumably, the only time there will be a bunching of people congregating is in the morning when people are coming to work and he said if there are employees who are worried about the entrance that they could come in a little bit early or a little bit late. County Executive Harris said it is his position that everyone is to come through one entrance.

County Executive Harris said that if another entrance is open then you essentially thwart the security measures that are taken at the front door and the county is spending “an awful lot of money” for that security area. If there is a large leak in that system then he does not think we should be spending that kind of money.

DA Gossett said he understands the expenditures. However, Gossett said Covid is probably the biggest threat right now, employees bringing in guns is not. We have 14 people dead from Covid, we are missing the point.

Judge Seifert asked the County Executive Harris to confirm if the authority of the entrance screening to the Courthouse is under the County Executive, is it the Judiciary & Public Safety Committee, or if it is the County Board. She is asking for a final determination once and for all for everyone.

DA Gossett agreed and said we ultimately need to know an answer for who is responsible for making this decision, especially because we have something from the Health Director telling us to do this and someone is not doing it, so who is it, so who is responsible?

Clerk of Courts Melissa Pingel asked that we decide who is responsible to make this decision because the issue keeps coming up and there continues to be a non-answer. Pingel also stated that from what she understands is the Judges have exempted Court Commissioners, who are county employees from screening. She also said the deputies, and Sheriff’s civilian staff are also not screened. She stated that this is a case of several different people making the decision. Sheriff Matz acknowledged that this is true, he also stated Facilities are not always screened and neither are contractors.

DA Gossett said there is a serious lack of transparency and accountability in all of this. Right now there is a pandemic going on and the virus is killing people and no one is stepping up to be accountable for bad decisions. He asked who is it being reckless here and let us lay the blame where it belongs.

County Executive Harris says everyone should go through one entrance and in his opinion, bringing this topic up again is done in bad faith. Pingel asked County Executive Harris to expand on his bad faith comment for the minutes. County Executive Harris says no to separate entrances for employees, he also stated that any Sheriffs’ Deputy that works at the Security Center has the authority to unilaterally decide who is screened and who is not screened. The Sheriff is not under the purview of the County Executive.

County Executive stated it is not clear who has the authority but until he is told otherwise by the County Board, he said it is his decision. His decision is that everyone needs to go through the security center entrance.

Pingel asked the County Executive for clarification when he said “everyone” needs to come through the Security Center, she asked if it meant all county employees, facilities, contractors, civilian, everyone? Harris said it gets a little tricky when there is contract work being done but yes except for extraordinary circumstances, as concerned to who is waved around the metal detector is the security center’s decision.

Judge Seifert asked if there is someone that wants to make a request or had questions about the Security Center who would they go to? She asked County Executive Harris if it is not your authority who would be the person? County Executive Harris said managing the County is his job; he said the County Board is not to work in these details. Managing the Sheriff’s employees falls under the Sheriff, so there is some divided authority. However, if the question is if there should be a separate entrance for employees, his position is no.

Judge Seifert said that she was not sure about the deputies making that decision and asked Sheriff Matz what his thoughts were. Sheriff Matz says Commissioners are exempt, and so are the civilian screeners. He can have the civilians screened if that is the opinion of this committee.

Judge Seifert asked Sheriff Matz if there were any others that did not go through screening other than the Commissioners, Judges, and DAs?

He also stated that he is aware that others come into the building in the morning before the screening center is open such as Facilities, Courthouse employees, and contractors. Sheriff Matz said they try to scan as many contractors as they can but it is not always feasible.

Judge Seifert asked for a motion. DA Gossett made a motion that the committee recommend separate employee entrances be opened in order to follow best practices for social distancing and protect the community and courthouse employees from Covid-19. Pingel seconded the motion.

### **Votes: Roll Call**

Judge Karen Seifert-No  
Facilities Director Mike Elder-No  
State Public Defender Linda Meier-No  
County Executive Mark Harris-No  
Sheriff John Matz-No  
Emergency Management Linda Kollmann-No  
Victim Witness Coordinator: Terri Van Dellen-Yes  
Attorney Edward Jelinski-Yes  
District Court Administrator Jon Bellows-No  
District Attorney Christian Gossett-Yes  
Clerk of Circuit Court Melissa Pingel-Yes

**The motion fails; No-7, Yes-4**

Following the vote Pingel asked if we have a decision, Seifert said she did not think we have a decision. Pingel stated that it still seems as if no one will take responsibility, she asked whom would someone go to with an issue with the decision. There was no answer. Judge Seifert believes that when we opened it is the Judiciary and Public Safety or the County Board. DCA Bellows explained that the Courthouse Security Committees are advisory only and that is not really their role, his suggestion was to maybe bring it to JPS Committee and or County Board.

County Executive Harris added that he the manager of the county and he is elected, and Sheriff Matz is also elected, but decision on if there is a separate Courthouse employee entrance falls on the County Executive, but there is shared authority with Sheriff Matz because he has final say over his employees.

- 4. Courthouse Security Incidents:** Judge Seifert indicated there were two incidents since we last meet in January. One was on January 30, 2020, during a de novo of a temporary restraining order in Branch 2, and one on February 21, 2020, where a defendant had to be removed from the courtroom.
- 5. Report on Masks:** Sheriff Matz indicated that there are roughly 357 people coming through the Courthouse Security Center per day, this is 60% of the normal. No one has refused to wear a mask. Pingel asked if the report of 357 per day included the Courthouse employees, he said it did. He said they are giving out about 120 masks per day, roughly 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the people, he thought this would be the new normal.
- 6. County Issued Mask Policy:** Pingel indicated that a county issued mask policy was sent out by the County to department heads right before this meeting so she did not have a chance to review it; she asked for clarification on if the public was going to be required to wear masks. County Executive Harris indicated that we cannot make the public wear masks in the buildings. Sheriff Matz said that Corporation Counsel has determined that we cannot require masks for the public. Sheriff Matz said that no matter if a person wears a mask they would provide service.
- 7. Next Meeting: October 21, 2020 by Zoom.**

Respectfully submitted by Winnebago County Clerk of Courts Melissa Pingel