

## **THE RIGHT TO KNOW**

Officer X is short, skinny, and wears wire-rimmed glasses. His voice is nasally, and he sports his DOC ball-cap inside and out, no matter what the weather. He looks to be in his late twenties, but prison has distorted my ability to differentiate ages, so I could be wrong. Among prisoners, the joke about COs, is that they only work in Corrections because they can't make the cut as real cops. However, I doubt this is the case with Officer X, because the rumor is his father is the lieutenant here in Washington State's Monroe Correctional Complex.

I approached him today because we're in the midst of a global pandemic and prominent news stations have recently declared jails and prisons, the new epicenter. I approached him because MCC is the only facility in the state with confirmed cases of Covid-19, and the first prison in the country to have had a riot as a result. I heard this morning there was another confirmed case in my home, so I approached Officer X to ask if this was true.

I don't like interacting with him because he makes me uneasy. I don't mean to be judgmental, but at some point during my past three and a half years here, he began paying extra attention to me. Whenever I pass him in the halls, he orders me to stop so he can tell me I should wear tighter clothing, or pat me down. Sometimes he says, "Hey Trouble, come over here and talk to me," and then he asks me various questions about my day, in an attempt to make idle conversation.

So today, when he responded, "I don't know, and even if I did, I wouldn't tell you," his disinterest would have come as a relief if it hadn't meant that I don't have the right to information pertaining to my health and wellbeing.

The simplest action a person can take, it would seem, is to tell the truth. It requires no extra effort, or creativity. But one consistency which has been made abundantly clear to my neighbors and I during this pandemic, is that DOC either will not, or cannot operate with transparency, regardless of circumstance.

However, Officer X's response was also strangely gratifying, as it provided insight into the lens through which DOC views those whose lives have been entrusted to them. It confirmed that the standardized, "I don't know," which we've received anytime questions pertaining to Covid-19 in our home have arisen, is a tactical lie, constructed to keep information from our ears, and those of our loved ones who might speak up to the media on our behalf.

So for the first time since meeting him, I'm grateful to Officer X, because in one sentence, he told me more about whether or not my life is in danger than DOC has in the past four months.

The answer: You don't have the right to know.