MEMORANDUM

Date: March 15, 2021

To: The Honorable Steve Christy, Member
    Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckleberry
      County Administrator

Re: Your March 4, 2021 Memorandum Requesting COVID-19 Updates

In response to your March 4, 2021 memorandum, answers to your questions will be provided below.

The following responses relate to the first series of questions regarding the County’s Casa Alitas Welcome Center operated by Catholic Community Services.

1. Since its inception, how much money has Pima County invested to dates in the renovation, maintenance and general operation of the Casa Alitas facility? What are the various categories within the facility and in its operations that Pima County pays and is responsible for?

   Approximately $697,559 was spent to renovate and operate the Casa Alitas facility initially (January 1 – January 31, 2020). All of these costs have been reimbursed through Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Emergency Food and Shelter grants totaling $650,775 and a U.S. CDC Ebola Redirect grant dollars in the amount of $46,784.

   Since the pandemic, operating costs have been minimal and relate to simply utility related costs for which we will again submit a grant through the FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter Program. The utility costs are approximately $6,329 per month. The particular FEMA grant program is a reimbursement grant, which simply means monies will not be paid to the County for future expenses, only those that we have incurred by providing these services at Casa Alitas.

2. Since its inception what has been the total number of asylum seekers who have been accommodated and received assistance at the Casa Alitas facility?

   From August 2019 through February 2021, 7555 individuals.

3. What was the average daily population of asylum seekers up to January 1, 2021 and what is the daily population of asylum seekers from January 2 through March 1, 2021?

   On average 20 or less.
4. What is the average daily cost per asylum seeker incurred by Pima County and what is the average length of stay per asylum seeker?

**Approximately 2 days**

5. How many asylum seekers have been tested for COVID-19 and what is the COVID-19 testing policy for all asylum seekers? Which type of COVID-19 test is being utilized for this population? What is the COVID-19 positive infection rate and where is the testing being conducted? Who is paying for the testing? What is the total cost to the taxpayers to date for COVID-19 testing of this population? What next steps are taken if an asylum seeker tests positive for COVID-19?

All of the asylum seekers turned over to the County by US Customs and Border Protection or any other federal agency receive a COVID-19 Rapid BiNEX test. The Catholic Community Services staff have been trained by our Health Department staff in the operation of the BiNEX test. They conduct the test and the equipment was provided to Pima County by the State Department of Health Services at no cost to the County. The cartridges are also provided to the County by the State at no cost.

Of the tests administered to date, approximately 1 percent of asylum seekers have resulted in a positive test. The cost to the County taxpayers for this testing is minimal. If an asylum seeker tests positive for COVID-19, they are immediately isolated and placed in quarantine during the required quarantine period.

6. Does Pima County pay NGOs for any of their support of functions at Casa Alitas? If so, to whom and how much?

**The County does not pay any non-governmental organization (NGO) for their operation of Casa Alitas.**

Regarding the second series of questions, Embry Health is as described in the email you received from their Director of Government Relations, Joseph Harris. I understand they have limited operations in Pima County and do not have a contract with Pima County as they did not respond to our Request for Proposals for COVID-19 testing. I have no idea why they would contact your office requesting payment from the State. I am uncertain if they have a contract with the State for COVID-19 testing. If so, they should contact the State for any reimbursement.

With regard to who permitted Embry Health, the State qualifies testing contractor and they would be the agency who permitted Embry Health to operate in Pima County.

Regarding your third series of questions, the County does not permit or regulate private, parochial, or charter schools; therefore, we would have no knowledge as to how many remained open during the pandemic. We are only notified by a particular school if they have an outbreak of COVID-19. To date, there have been 3674 COVID-19 infections representing a total of 63 outbreaks related to private, parochial, or charter schools.
In response to your fourth series of questions, during the March 2, 2021 Board meeting, I did not make a statement that Pima County would continue testing even if the Board votes not to continue. What I did say is that it is likely testing would continue within Pima County, but not be provided by the County. Presently, COVID-19 testing is provided by private and non-profit health clinics, hospitals, ASU and our contractor who is under contract with the State for testing at the Tucson International Airport. That testing would continue if the County, due to a lack of funding support by the State, ceased COVID-19 testing. Testing provided by other entities or agencies would obviously not be paid for by Pima County. The testing that we would suspend would be at those testing sites we now operate on a regular basis.

Regarding your fifth series of questions, the membership of the Eviction and Homelessness Prevention Task Force (EHPTF) is balanced and is not skewed or as you have stated, “tilts heavily towards housing activists.” The EHPTF’s report is final and the task force is no longer operating. As you will recall, they met beginning in the Summer of 2020, worked August through November and produced a final report in December 2020. This is the report I forwarded to the Board of Supervisors. We have asked the Chair of the EHPTF if there is a desire to reconvene as requested by the Board of Supervisors.

In answer to your final question, the cooperative agreement mentioned at the Arizona Border Counties Coalition meeting, is a public health cooperative agreement, similar to other mutual aid agreements that public safety agencies have throughout the County or State. At the beginning of the pandemic through today, our County public health agency is called upon to provide consulting services and provide information to other county public health agencies. We will continue to do so. The concept of a cooperative agreement formalizes that process and indicates, when the resources of one agency has been exhausted and are unable to adequately respond to a public safety/public health emergency. The agency with resources will respond during the emergency.

Finally, the Vaccination Flow Chart has been on our public website for some time. We will provide you with a paper copy so you can distribute it as you feel appropriate.

CHH/anc

Attachment

c: The Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors
MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 4, 2021
TO: Chuck Huckelberry, County Administrator
FROM: Steve Christy, District 4 Supervisor
SUBJECT: COVID-19 Updates - Questions

At your suggestion and direction, I am submitting a number of questions that I wished to ask during the Pima County Board of Supervisors Meeting on Tuesday, March 2.

The first series of questions pertain to the current status of Pima County's Casa Alitas Welcome Center. I am respectfully asking for a general and current update on its operations, particularly as to how COVID-19 has affected its functions, specifically:

- Since its inception, how much money has Pima County invested to date in the renovation, maintenance and general operation of the Casa Alitas facility? What are the various categories within the facility and in its operations that Pima County pays and is responsible for?
- Since its inception what has been the total number of asylum seekers who have been accommodated and received assistance at the Casa Alitas facility?
- What was the average daily population of asylum seekers up to January 1, 2021 and what is the daily population of asylum seekers from January 2 through March 1, 2021?
- What is the average daily cost per asylum seeker incurred by Pima County and what is the average length of stay per asylum seeker?
- How many asylum seekers have been tested for COVID-19 and what is the COVID-19 testing policy for all asylum seekers? Which type of COVID-19 test is being utilized for this population? What is the COVID-19 positive infection rate and where is the testing being conducted? Who is paying for the testing? What is the total cost to taxpayers to date for COVID-19 testing of this population? What next steps are taken if an asylum seeker tests positive for COVID-19?
- Does Pima County pay NGOs for any of their support or functions at Casa Alitas? If so, to whom and how much?

My second series of questions deal with a testing firm called Embry Health (See attachment). Who or what are they? Do they have operations in Pima County? Does Pima County have a contract with the group? What are the testing parameters. Why would they be asking my office for payment from the State and notifying my office that they have not received any payment to date? Who permitted them to operate in Pima County and to set up testing sites?
My third series of questions focus on what data has been collected regarding infections within Private, Parochial, and Charter Schools that have remained open during the pandemic? How many such schools have actually remained open and fully operational during the pandemic? Dr. Garcia indicated that the Pima County Health Department had been tracking that information, yet none appears to be publically available.

My fourth series of questions pertain to the March 2 meeting’s agenda item relating to suspending Pima County’s COVID-19 testing efforts. My understanding is that there may potentially be no more funds to cover Pima County’s COVID Testing activities and the Board was going to be asked to decide if testing should be continued or not. In a related question to this issue, you made a statement to the effect that Pima County will continue testing even if the Board votes not to. You indicated that various gradations of testing will continue. What COVID-19 testing are you asking the Board to consider terminating? If that particular current COVID-19 testing is in fact terminated, what are the details of the other COVID-19 testing that you indicated would continue and who would be paying for them?

My fifth series of questions deal with the composition of the existing Eviction and Homelessness Prevention Task Force. Upon review and analysis, the task force does not appear to be equally weighed in stakeholder positions. There is an imbalance in the committee’s make-up that tilts heavily towards housing activists, with inadequate private sector representation. What are the mechanisms to review and amend the Eviction and Homelessness Prevention Task Force membership to correct this inequity?

My final question deals with last Friday’s meeting of the Arizona Border Counties Coalition. The meeting agenda has an item, to be addressed by you, entitled, “Cooperative Agreement”. Please define and explain the scope of this Cooperative Agreement.

Additionally, when questioned about my office’s request for a “Vaccination Flow Chart”, Dr. Garcia referred to a link on Pima County Health Department’s website where it resides. The existence of this flow chart has not been publicized, and sadly it does not address the challenge of those who are unable to access it due to technology limitations.

I thank you for your attention to these questions and for your timely response to them.
Supervisor Christy,

My name is Joseph Harris, and I am Embry Health’s newly appointed Government Relations Director. As a native Arizonan and through my work on various political campaigns, I have been able to travel to all parts of the state and work with many Arizonans from all walks of life.

I look forward to working with you and your staff in order to create a lasting relationship with Embry Health and our 65+ COVID-19 testing & vaccination sites in Arizona. We are Arizona’s largest provider for drive-through, zero cost COVID-19 testing, and now vaccination.

In 2014, JoEllen Embry, WHNP, chose to open Embry Women's Health after 31 years in the industry. At the beginning of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, our CEO Raymond Embry and his partner Zachary Travis decided to step up to the plate and launched Embry Health and its companies out of the local women's health practice. They wanted to ensure zero-cost testing to the public. He found that Embry Health was one of few practices responding to the crisis, by providing testing to all patients that are safe, reliable, and zero-cost, regardless of their insurance coverage.

Running an operation of this scale is no easy task. Since last March, we have expanded to all corners of the State of Arizona. Providing over 1.25 million tests and testing over 900,000 Arizonans. This includes our 30+ rural Arizona sites. Serving rural Arizona has been important for Embry Health from the very beginning of the pandemic. We will continue to serve the community as best we can, funding or no funding.
Embry Health is currently onboarding our testing sites across the state to serve as COVID-19 vaccination sites. We have successfully completed four major vaccination campaigns.

I hope that we will be able to service your community soon. As of this moment, our company has not received any emergency funding from the State of Arizona. On Friday, February 19th, ADHS released $100 million to counties to support COVID-19 testing. We are asking for monetary relief for staffing, laboratory testing, informatics, disease surveillance, and other activities critical to combating COVID-19. Our existing sites are up and running and ready to serve.

I appreciate all the hard work you have done for the people of Arizona. I hope to hear from you soon.

Joseph Harris
Director of Government Relations
Embry Health • TestNOW