

WITNESS STATEMENT OF [REDACTED]

1. This statement is about my experience in Victoria's COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Program.
2. I entered quarantine at the Crown Promenade Hotel on June 16 and left on June 30.

Arrival in Melbourne

3. I arrived at Tullamarine airport on June 16 from Florida. Our plane landed at about 11am.
4. My wife, my 3-year-old son and my 2-year-old daughter travelled with me. My wife was 28 weeks pregnant at the time.
5. Before arriving in Melbourne, I did not know anything about Victoria's Hotel Quarantine Program, other than what friends and family living in Australia had told me.
6. My family and I are observant Jews and adhere to a strict kosher diet.
7. I had contacted an acquaintance from my religious community who worked at the Department of Health and Human Services (the **Department**), to let them know that we would be entering quarantine, so that the Department would know about my family's religious requirements.
8. At the airport, I was given a form to sign. I was also provided with a "1800" number, which I was told to call if I had any questions.
9. I mentioned our Kosher requirements to someone from the Department who was at the airport. He told me words to the effect that it had been "*sorted out*". I also mentioned that my wife was 28-weeks pregnant and we were told that everything would be taken care of.
10. There were three or four buses waiting near the plane. We waited in the bus for about 20 or 30 minutes. The door of the bus was mostly kept closed and there was nothing to separate the bus driver from the passengers. While we were waiting, my wife asked the driver to open the door so that she could get some air and go to the bathroom. The driver was not wearing a mask while driving the bus.

Arrival at the hotel

11. We reached the Crown Promenade Hotel just after 1.00pm and my family was asked to leave the bus in pairs. I got off the bus with one of my children and my wife got off the bus with my other child. Then we joined each other in the lobby of the hotel. I did

not understand why we had to leave the bus in pairs when we were allowed to stand close together in the lobby.

12. We were the first people to come off the bus and I didn't see what happened behind us.
13. In the lobby, all the arriving guests lined up at the reception desk. We were given some printed information and again told to call the "1800" number if we had any questions.
14. I telephoned the "1800" number several times during my period in quarantine. It seemed that the number was a general line for government support services. Each time I called the number, I was transferred to another person or told that somebody would call me back.

Settling in at the hotel

15. Two security guards took our luggage from the bus, up to our room. The guards were wearing face masks, but they were not wearing gloves or any other personal protective equipment.
16. We stayed in adjoining rooms on the tenth floor of the hotel. Our room was the first door on the right after stepping out of the elevator.
17. Soon after we arrived at the hotel, some kosher food was given to us. We had requested a specific level of kosher and the food that we were provided in quarantine (although it was kosher) never met that level.
18. I used the "1800" number to complain that the food was not the level of kosher that we had requested. I was told to call the caterer and suggest to him that he subcontract to someone who could give the level of kosher certification we needed. I thought the idea of suggesting subcontracting was ridiculous but I did contact the caterer and spoke with him about our requirements.
19. It seems that no one had told the caterers that my wife was pregnant, because they would send food that was unsuitable for her (like smoked salmon), when I called the caterer about it, he told me that he was never informed that she was pregnant.
20. We were told that we were not allowed to be sent alcohol and we could not order alcohol to be delivered from supermarkets or other places. My understanding was that we could not have alcohol in the hotel. About one week after we arrived in quarantine, a piece of paper was slipped under our door, advertising a "special offer" on alcoholic drinks on sale from the hotel.

21. I was bored while I was in quarantine and would sometimes watch what was happening in the corridor through the peephole in the door.

Interaction with Hotel Security Guards

22. There were chairs along the corridor of the hotel, which were used by security guards.
23. From what I saw, there were always at least two security guards on duty in the corridor. There was usually one guard sitting about 1.5 metres to the right of our room and another guard about 3 metres to the left. Those chairs were in the central part of the corridor. As far as I could tell, there was no consistency in where the guards sat.
24. The security guards usually wore face masks that looked like surgical masks. Sometimes they wore fabric masks that seemed home-made. The security guards at the hotel seldomly wore gloves and never any other personal protective equipment.
25. Sometimes I saw the guards chatting to each other. They were not physically distant when they were chatting.
26. A handful of times, security guards knocked on our door to tell us that people in other rooms had complained about our children making noise. Sometimes, after about half an hour, a security guard would knock on the door of our other room, apparently not realising that we were the same family. It seemed that the security guards were unaware that we were one family sharing two adjoining rooms.
27. One evening, food was left at our door. After picking up the package, I realised that it was not ours because it was from a pizza and pasta restaurant (which meant that it was not kosher). I opened the door to our room and called a guard over. I explained to him that the food had been delivered to us by mistake. I handed the food to the guard. He took it straight from my hands and said he would take it to another room. I did not see what he did, but I assume that the security guard handed the food to another person in quarantine.

Fresh Air Breaks

28. On our second day in quarantine, we were told that we could take a walk outside at 9pm. Our children would have been asleep at that time, so we asked to take a walk on the following day instead.
29. We were instructed to wear face masks when we went for walks. We had our own fabric masks which we had bought from the United States. The security guards who supervised us on walks were not particular about how we wore our masks. They said

nothing if our children pulled off their masks or if my wife pulled her mask down below her nose.

30. There was hand sanitiser throughout the hotel, but we were never asked to use it when we left our rooms.
31. On our eighth or ninth day in quarantine, we went for a walk. Before we left the room, they asked us if we had washed our hands. That was the only time that anyone asked us to wash or sanitise our hands during our time in quarantine.
32. Each walk lasted for around 10 or 20 minutes. There was no consistent time that we went for a walk and sometimes planned walks would be cancelled at the last minute. My kids would have their coats and masks on, waiting to go outside, and the walk would be cancelled without any notice.
33. Sometimes, when we left our rooms for a fresh air break, a security guard told us that there could be no more than two quarantined guests in the elevator at a time (so I travelled in the elevator with one of my children and my wife travelled in a different elevator with my other child). At other times (even on the same walk) my family was allowed to travel in the same elevator together. There did not seem to be any reason for the rule changes.
34. During our first walk outside, a security guard told us we could take our face masks off, so that we could get fresh air. Three days later, during our second walk outside, a security guard told us that we had to wear our masks. We asked why and the guard explained that a guest had complained about people not wearing masks. Throughout our stay, the instructions about whether we needed to wear masks outside kept changing. The same security guards would give us different instructions, depending on the day.
35. For walks, we were taken to decks that were on either end of the hotel, overlooking the main road. My kids would just go around in a circle for the whole time. Each deck was about the same size. They were wooden decks surrounded by two walls from the building and there was a roof on top. The decks were not publicly accessible. We sometimes saw other people using the decks, but those people looked like they were in quarantine as well.
36. The decks had a wooden area and a rocky area. Sometimes the security guards would not let us walk on the rocky area and other times they would.

37. When we went on walks, two security guards would accompany us. I remember seeing guards taking their masks off to drink coffee while we were outside. The guards would keep a distance from us (behind a barrier) while we were on walks, but they stood quite close to one another. They walked around together, almost as one unit.
38. From the 11th day that we were in quarantine, a nurse or prison guard came along with the two security guards who took us out for walks.
39. On one walk, I talked with a prison guard for about 15 minutes. He stood about 2 feet away from me while he spoke to me. I was surprised because he was standing so close to me, and the guards usually kept their distance. We talked about his work in the prison and he told me he thought quarantined guests were treated worse than the most violent prisoners.

Interaction with Nurses

40. Nurses called our room multiple times each day.
41. Because my wife was pregnant, some of the calls were about her health.
42. On one occasion, two nurses came into our room to give my wife a “finger prick test” to check her blood sugar levels. Those nurses wore face masks, goggles, gloves and gowns. I was surprised that they came into our room – I thought that they could have done the test through the door.
43. At other times, nurses came to check on my wife, but they did not come into the room. On one occasion, during our fresh air walk, a nurse took my wife out for a walk in the corridor and had a conversation with her for about 10 minutes.
44. When the nurses dealt with us through the doorway or joined us for a walk, they wore face masks but no other personal protective equipment.
45. A mental health nurse would call my wife each day. My wife felt very claustrophobic in quarantine and she couldn't breathe sometimes.

Testing for COVID-19

46. On our third day in quarantine, we were offered a COVID-19 test, but we refused. The nurses asked us why we did not want to be tested, and we said that we did not want to have the swab put up our kids' noses unless it was necessary.
47. On our tenth day in quarantine, nurses offered us the test again and we refused for the same reason.

48. On the eleventh day that we were in quarantine, I heard (either through family members or by reading the news on my phone) that if we did not get tested for COVID-19, we would have to stay in quarantine for longer.
49. I called the "1800" number and spoke to someone from the Department to request a test. At 4pm that day, three nurses came to our room. The nurse who gave us the test was wearing a face mask, goggles, gloves and a gown. The test was done through the doorway and the nurses did not come into our room.
50. We had a conversation with the nurses about the procedure for the test. We had heard that there was a cheek swab test, which could be done instead of the nasal swab test. We said that we only wanted a cheek swab. The nurse who did the test told us that she would do a cheek swab but she said that she would write down that she had done the full test (including the nasal swab).
51. The nurse stuck a long swab down my wife's throat and another long swab down my throat. It was not a cheek swab and we felt that we had been lied to. The nurse swabbed my children's cheeks, not the back of their throats. None of us was given a nasal swab.

Contact with the Department

52. Because my wife was pregnant and because we had small kids, we had many requests while we were in quarantine. We made lots of calls to the Department about logistical issues.

Request for a bath

53. My wife was suffering with back pain because of her pregnancy. A bath would have made her more comfortable, but there was no bath in our rooms.
54. Someone from the DHHS said to me: "I have to to speak with the AO". From what I understood, it sounded like "AOs" were the ones that get things done. I asked someone what an "AO" was and they told me it meant "Authorising Officer".
55. I never saw anyone at the hotel who identified themselves as an Authorised Officer. As far as I could tell, none of the people working for the quarantine program wore identification or name tags.
56. On our second day in quarantine, I called the "1800" number and asked to speak with the Authorised Officer. It took me three days to get hold of an Authorised Officer. On the fifth day in quarantine, I spoke on the phone with an Authorised Officer who said

his name was [REDACTED]. I asked him to move me and my family to a room with a bath. [REDACTED] told me that there was no room in the hotel with a bath.

57. I used Google to look up information about the hotel and found out that there were rooms with baths in the hotel. I contacted [REDACTED] and he admitted to me that there were rooms with baths but said that we could not have one.
58. A nurse offered to prescribe painkillers to my wife for her back pain.

Request for cleaning products

59. No cleaning staff could come into our rooms and, at first, there were no cleaning products for us to use. Some time during our first week in quarantine, we called the "1800" number and asked them to give us cleaning products. After three days, some cleaning products were delivered.
60. One weekend, we called the "1800" number and asked for a vacuum cleaner because the kids had made so much mess. We were told that there were no vacuum cleaners and we would just have to put up with it.
61. We were often told by people from the Department that *"you knew what you were getting into"*. We were told words to the effect that *"you knew we were being locked in and wouldn't get certain things, like walks everyday"* and *"no one promised you walks"*. Hotel quarantine staff were not always understanding and at times my wife was told words to the effect that *"you're not the first pregnant woman to come here"*.

Request for more walks

62. On around the fourth day of our time in quarantine, I called the authorising officer and asked for our walks to be daily. He refused and said that walks were *"maxed out"*. From the windows in our rooms, I had a good view of the decks that were used for fresh air breaks and I could see that they were often empty. I told him that I could see that the decks were mostly empty and suggested that walks were being refused because the quarantine program was understaffed. He said that they were not understaffed, they were just *"maxed out on walks"*.
63. My wife called the mental health nurse, crying, asking for a daily walk. From that day, we got walks every day (sometimes twice a day) and I observed that the decks were often being used for fresh air breaks.

Toys and deliveries

64. The Department provided some toys for my children while we were in quarantine. They gave us coloured pencils and paper. They delivered some puzzles, but they were not appropriate for our kids' age. They also provided the same doll a number of times (a stuffed zebra). At one point the Department said that they did not have any more toys and suggested that we get our family to send toys.
65. My Mum sent us toys, food, magazines and other things.
66. At one point, my mother sent a package with food and the staff removed the food and refused to let us have it. We complained that we had been allowed to have a food delivery the day before and they said something like *"ok, ok, you can have it then"*.
67. One day, when we were bored, we put up an "SOS" sign in our window, facing onto the main road. We made the sign with coloured pencils and paper, as a joke. Five minutes later, we noticed security guards standing on the ground in front of the hotel, counting the room windows. It looked like they were trying to work out which room the sign was in. We took the sign down and no one ever mentioned it to us.
68. The procedure for laundry was a mess and I was repeatedly told different information about whether we had to pay for laundry.

Record keeping and communication

69. In the beginning of our stay when I rang the "1800" number, I gave them my room number and name, but they did not have any record of me. Adult meals were delivered that were labelled with my children's names and the two remaining meals were labelled "child". Sometimes the Department would call and ask to speak with my two-year-old daughter (because their records indicated that she was an adult). Eventually, I worked out that the Department had recorded my son and daughter as father and mother and my wife and I as children.
70. On one of the days while we were in quarantine, my mother told me that the Department had called her on her landline phone, asking for me. She said she told the Department that I was in quarantine. She said that they seemed confused about where I was and asked her what hotel we were in.
71. We often received phone calls in our room at ridiculous hours; late at night or before 7am. The only people who didn't call at ridiculous times were the mental health nurses.

72. We called the “1800” number on the first Friday that we were in quarantine and explained that we could not answer the phone on Saturdays because it was the Sabbath. We asked them not to call us on Saturdays.
73. The next day, the phone rang repeatedly, from early in the morning.
74. Around 2pm, a mental health nurse knocked on the door. When we opened the door, the nurse said that they were checking on us because we had not answered our phone even though they called us eight times. No-one had explained to the nurse that they should not call us because of the Sabbath. Our phone also rang repeatedly on the following Saturday.

Leaving hotel quarantine

75. The day before we were due to leave the hotel, we had not received the results of our COVID-19 test. I called the “1800” number at 11pm and asked for the results. I was told that the Department did not have them.
76. We asked them to call us as soon as they had the results, but we asked not to ring before 7am as our kids would be sleeping. The Department called at 6.30am and woke up my kids. We were told that our COVID-19 test results were negative and that we would be leaving the hotel at 11am or midday.
77. At 10.30am, guards came to our room and said that it was time to go. We were not ready and we asked for more time.
78. The security guards helped us with our luggage using two trolleys. My wife and I worked together with the guards to load the luggage onto the trolleys. The guards did not keep their distance from us.
79. When we got to the lobby, someone took a photo of the end of our detention notice and my identification. There were two taxis waiting for us.
80. We were not asked to wear face masks or any personal protective equipment in the taxi. It was as if we walked out and everything was fine – we were treated like COVID-free people in a COVID-free zone.

After leaving quarantine

81. The next day, my wife had an appointment booked with her ob-gyn. The ob-gyn asked for a copy of my wife’s COVID-19 test result. We did not have a copy of the result, so I called the Department to ask for it. They said that I should have been given to us when we left quarantine. They told me that they could not provide a copy of it, because they

did not have the original and that they could not email me a digital copy. We never received any written confirmation of the results of our COVID-19 test and the ob-gyn accepted our end of detention notice as proof that we did not have COVID-19.

Signature _____ 

Print name _____ 

Date 8/16/2020