



Ilchep.org
Illinoischep@gmail.com

March 12, 2020

Dear Governor Pritzker,

We thank you for issuing a disaster proclamation on Monday, March 9, 2020 for the state of Illinois. We fully support the efforts you outlined during the announcement saying, “our priority is getting ahead and staying ahead in our response, and doing so with the safety of our most vulnerable residents at the core of our preparedness.” We are writing to you as a collective that is concerned over Illinois’ most vulnerable residents who are incarcerated and employed in our prisons and jails.

Please consider immediately ordering a review of all people in Illinois prisons and jails who are elderly or infirm, with an eye toward providing medical furloughs or compassionate release to as many of them as possible.

Prisons in particular are known incubators and amplifiers of infectious diseases. Once a virus like the one causing COVID 19 enters a prison, it is almost certain to infect a significant proportion of the incarcerated population and employees. In China, hundreds of people in prison have already been diagnosed as positive for COVID 19.

The good news is that the death rate for COVID 19 appears to be low among healthy people under the age of 70, with many people asymptomatic.

Conversely, the death rate among the elderly and those with pre-existing health issues is particularly high. People with cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, hepatitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, chronic kidney diseases, and cancer are especially susceptible. Twenty percent of the population in Illinois prisons are elderly.

Were the CoronaVirus to infect a given prison population while simultaneously raging in the outside world and pressing hospitals to their limits—which is likely to be the case—the deaths among incarcerated populations would be difficult to avoid. In addition, incarcerated people as a group are likely to be given lower priority when medical services become scarce in the broader community.

We are, therefore, asking you to consider immediately ordering a review of all people in Illinois prisons and jails who are elderly or infirm, with an eye toward providing medical furloughs or compassionate release to as many of them as possible. Doing so would not only protect them, but also other incarcerated people, officers, and staff by decreasing the strain on resources within the prisons once the virus hits. We hope that particular consideration will be given to the high percentage of elderly women and men currently in prison who have already served decades behind bars.

We ask you to move swiftly. In order for any release program to be effective at lowering the threat to vulnerable populations and others, it would have to happen before the virus is detected in our prisons and jails. Ordering a review would not commit you to releasing people. But a release cannot happen prior to a review, and a thorough review cannot be accomplished overnight. It would need to begin almost immediately.

In addition, there are other ways to mitigate the spread of COVID 19 within prisons and decrease their potential to be reservoirs of disease. These include making accurate information about the virus available to incarcerated individuals as a matter of priority and distributing soap to them for free. We would be happy to discuss any of these approaches with you in greater detail.

In that vein, along with this letter, we are sending the following letters to express our concern for incarcerated people in Illinois (found in Appendices A, B, and C):

- A) To the Prisoner Review Board, asking them to expedite the granting of good time credits to bring the overall prison population to the level the system was built for, so that the medical staff will not be overrun in the midst of an outbreak;
- B) To Illinois State's Attorneys, to ask that we bypass jail admissions in all possible cases, and test individuals who we deem necessary to jail;
- C) To each of Illinois' prison wardens and county sheriffs, that they work with their facility's Infection Control Nurse to develop specific protocols for how their facility would respond to a positive case of COVID 19. We recommend:
 - protocols for providing to all those in your facility preventative materials such as hand sanitizers, disinfectant wipes, and soap;
 - a provision for quarantining anyone who tests positive for the virus at a hospital, not at the prison or jail;
 - a commitment that at no point will a facility be locked down or closed off to outsiders to be considered in their entirety as places of "quarantine." Family members and lawyers must maintain access to their clients and loved ones.

However, first and foremost, we hope you will undertake a review of the prison and jail population in Illinois for the purpose of identifying those elderly and infirm individuals who are at greatest risk of dying from COVID 19, and releasing them as a matter of urgency.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely Yours,
Illinois Coalition for Higher Education in Prison
and 1,587 additional individuals and organizations, as of March 12, 2020 at 12pm.

cc. (via email)
Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton
IL State Legislators
Prisoner Review Board
IL State's Attorneys
IL Prison Wardens and County Sheriffs
Rob Jeffreys, Director, IDOC

Appendix A - Letter to the Prisoner Review Board

Honorable Craig Findley and Members of the Prisoner Review Board,

In light of the expansion of the threat of COVID 19 and the increased vulnerability and capacity for transmission in carceral facilities, we request that you begin taking action to minimize the impact in Illinois' prison system.

This letter is one of a package of letters sent to Illinois authorities with whom our state entrusts the care of incarcerated people. The primary letter is written to Governor Pritzker, requesting that he consider immediately ordering a review of all people in Illinois prisons who are elderly or infirm, with an eye toward providing medical furloughs or compassionate release to as many of them as possible.

He will certainly look to you for assistance in identifying which elderly and vulnerable individuals no longer pose a threat to public safety. Yet, even enacting compassionate release for elderly or infirm individuals in the Illinois Department of Corrections is not enough. Should an outbreak occur in our prison system, the health care providers in IDOC would be overrun and unable to handle the demand for care. We request that you expedite the process of granting good time credits, especially those outlined by PA 101-0440. We also ask that you consider releasing the individuals currently in the system who are only incarcerated on technical violations, with the goal of relieving the overcrowded prison system, and its healthcare system, as much as possible.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely Yours,

Illinois Coalition for Higher Education in Prison

and 1,587 additional individuals and organizations, as of March 12, 2020 at 12pm.

cc. (via email)

Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton

IL State Legislators

Prisoner Review Board

IL State's Attorneys

IL Prison Wardens and County Sheriffs

Rob Jeffreys, Director, IDOC

Appendix B - Letter to IL State's Attorneys

Illinois State's Attorneys,

In light of the expansion of the threat of COVID 19 and the increased vulnerability and capacity for transmission in carceral facilities, we request that you begin taking action to minimize the likelihood of infection in Illinois' jails.

We ask that you temporarily ensure that only in extraordinary circumstances should any new arrestee be detained at the jails, and that you allow no one to be admitted without testing.

Given what are typically shorter lengths of stay and higher numbers of admissions in our county jails, individuals held in our jails are perhaps the most vulnerable residents in the state. Please reduce the risk of transmission into our jails by slowing the admission rate during this time.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely Yours,

Illinois Coalition for Higher Education in Prison

and 1,587 additional individuals and organizations, as of March 12, 2020 at 12pm.

cc. (via email)

Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton

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Rob Jeffreys, Director, IDOC

Appendix C - Letter to Prison Wardens and County Sheriffs

Illinois' Prison Wardens and County Sheriffs,

In light of the expansion of the threat of COVID 19 and the increased vulnerability and capacity for transmission in carceral facilities, we know that you are working diligently to prevent the spread of COVID 19 in your facilities and to prepare your facility for how to respond should there be an outbreak.

As you make those preparations, we request that you include:

- protocols for providing to all those in your facility preventative materials such as hand sanitizers, disinfectant wipes, soap, etc;
- a provision for quarantining anyone who tests positive for the virus at a hospital, not at the prison or jail;
- a commitment that at no point will a facility be locked down or closed off to outsiders to be considered in their entirety as places of "quarantine." Family members and lawyers must maintain access to their clients and loved ones.

This letter is one of a package of letters sent to Illinois authorities with whom our state entrusts the care of incarcerated people. The primary letter is written to Governor Pritzker, requesting that he consider immediately ordering a review of all people in Illinois prisons and jails who are elderly or infirm, with an eye toward providing medical furloughs or compassionate release to as many of them as possible.

We thank you for your concern for those entrusted to your care.

Sincerely Yours,

Illinois Coalition for Higher Education in Prison

and 1,587 additional individuals and organizations, as of March 12, 2020 at 12pm.

cc. (via email)

Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton

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Rob Jeffreys, Director, IDOC