

May 21, 2020

The Honorable Governor Mike DeWine
Vern Riffe Center,
77 S. High St, FL 30
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Governor DeWine,

As members of the Correctional Institution Inspection Committee, we write to you today to call for further, immediate action to limit the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in Ohio's overcrowded jails and prisons. As of May 19th, COVID-19 has taken the lives of 63 inmates and four prison employees, while hundreds more have been infected. We are concerned that these outbreaks have not been sufficiently contained and threaten the health and safety of all Ohioans.

While we recognize and appreciate the steps that the state has taken to address this crisis, we believe there is still more that must be done to protect corrections employees and incarcerated Ohioans.

We respectfully recommend that the following steps be taken to combat the public health crisis in Ohio's prisons:

1. Form a task force to address the spread of COVID-19 in prisons

A dedicated taskforce would draw expertise from the Correctional Institution Inspection Committee, the Governor's Administration, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation Services, the Department of Youth Services, the Correctional Institution Inspection Committee, the Parole Board and formerly incarcerated people or people with loved ones incarcerated to identify the needs of incarcerated Ohioans and corrections staff during this public health crisis and recommend solutions.

2. Expand early release efforts for low-risk, nonviolent offenders

This highly contagious virus flourishes in confined spaces such as prisons. To help prevent the spread, we must reduce overcrowding by expanding early release efforts for low-risk, nonviolent offenders. This would mean reevaluating the criteria used to identify these offenders to include consideration of:

1. Pre-existing conditions that make them more vulnerable to contracting COVID-19;
2. Offenders over the age of 60;
3. Offenders serving time for a "technical" violation of post-release conditions;
4. Offenders serving time for Drug Possession as their most serious offense;
5. Offenders serving time for low-level, non-violent felonies (4th and 5th degree levels).

3. Stop accepting new inmates at state facilities

Ohio's prison facilities were exceptionally overcrowded before the pandemic. Ohio's prison population currently exceeds 49,000 inmates in facilities designed to accept roughly 15,000 fewer inmates than the current population. Increasing the population amid a viral outbreak only

increases the risk of further infections and death, regardless of the risk mitigation efforts deployed.

4. Continue to increase testing

The recent decision to end mass testing in Ohio's prisons is concerning. Testing would allow resources to be directed to prisons experiencing outbreaks and that need the most help. We support increased testing to better diagnose, isolate and treat COVID-19 cases in state prisons.

These actions would save lives and protect the health of some of our most vulnerable Ohioans. Health disparities have caused COVID-19 to have a devastatingly disproportionate impact on black and brown communities. This is likely to be exacerbated in our criminal justice system, which disproportionately incarcerates individuals of color. We implore you to take action now, and look forward to collaborating with you on this serious matter.

Yours in Service,



Representative Erica C. Crawley



Representative Jeff Crossman

cc: ODRC Director Annette Chambers-Smith