



**INTERFAITH
CRIMINAL
JUSTICE
COALITION**

May 7, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable James Jordan
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate

As faith-based organizations, and members of the Washington Interfaith Staff Community (WISC), we want to ensure that current and formerly incarcerated people are not made invisible in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the issues that we are highlighting we also encourage you to adopt the comprehensive recommendations proposed by the Justice Roundtable, a coalition of over 100 organizations committed to advocating for a transformative and restorative justice system. How our nation addresses this issue reflects our values.

This global health crisis places millions at risk, and those who are incarcerated are in a particularly vulnerable situation. People in prison live in overcrowded and compromised sanitary conditions with limited access to resources that meet the Center for Disease Control's recommended hygiene routines to protect themselves. The impact on those with underlying health issues, including the elderly and those with compromised immune systems, is exacerbated by these conditions. An uncontained outbreak within a penal facility would be catastrophic. As people of faith, we believe that it would be immoral and inhumane to not do everything possible to prevent such fatal outcomes.

We were glad to see increased funding for the Bureau of Prisons' COVID-19 response in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. We would also like to thank the Bureau of Prisons for increasing the time allotted for phone calls in incarceration facilities. Though these efforts are welcome, there is still so much to be done.

Stopping the spread of the virus and saving lives is a global concern. Reducing incarceration levels to limit overcrowding is a means to that



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end. Accordingly, we urge you to use available mechanisms to release as many people as possible applying the Justice Collaborative's Decarceration Guidelines, including:

- Immediate release of elderly and medically vulnerable people;
- Early release of anyone within 18 months of their release date; and
- Lift of any ban to access social services (such as SNAP and TANF) and housing for people who will be, and who have already been, released.

For the general health of staff and those who are incarcerated we urge penal facilities to:

- Provide soap and water readily available and accessible for everyone; and
- Create, release publicly, implement, and enforce a policy, vetted by public health officials for handling COVID-19 within each facility.

To ensure that formerly incarcerated people are not disproportionately affected by the economic downturn that has come in the wake of this pandemic we urge Congress to:

- Amend the Small Business Administration payroll protection loan application to remove any exclusion of formerly incarcerated individuals
- Explicitly include formerly incarcerated people in all economic relief programs

As people of faith, we have a moral obligation to speak on this issue and its impact on the most vulnerable. At this time, COVID-19 is spreading throughout our nation's prisons, which will become the epicenters for horrible outcomes. This crisis lays bare the incredible inequities, limitations and healthcare challenges in already overcrowded prisons. Moreover, the pervasive systemic issues of racism and classism are only exacerbated by how those who are incarcerated will be treated during the COVID-19 outbreak. We hereby lift our voices on behalf of and with those who are far too often ignored.

All life is sacred.

Signed

African American Ministers in Action
American Friends Service Committee



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Bread for the World
Christian Reform Church Office of Social Justice
Church of Scientology National Affairs Office
Church World Service
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good
Shepherd, U.S, Provinces
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Interfaith Action for Human Rights
Jesuit Conference - Office of Justice and Ecology
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good
Shepherd
National Alliance of Faith and Justice
National Council of Churches
National Religious Campaign Against Torture
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
The Episcopal Church
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and
Society

CC:

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Majority Leader
House of Representatives

The Honorable James Clyburn
Majority Whip
House of Representatives