

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



March 30, 2020

The Honorable Lawrence Hogan, J
Governor of Maryland
State House
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Robert Green
Secretary of Md. Dept. of Public Safety & Cor. Services
6776 Reisterstown Rd., Ste 310
Baltimore, MD 21215

re: Coronavirus and bipartisan support for protection of inmates of Md. prisons and detention centers

Dear Governor Hogan and Secretary Green:

I write you again on behalf of Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR), updating our support for you to take proactive steps to prevent the further spread of coronavirus in Maryland prisons and detention centers.

Earlier today, the first three coronavirus infections have been reported in Md. prisons, following yesterday's report of numerous infections from Clifton Perkins Hospital which is frequented by correctional officers. Coronavirus infections, as of yesterday, also were reported in prisons or detention centers in Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York and Wisconsin with Governors', corrections officials, and/or court orders for expedited releases in Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, Ohio, California, Colorado, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah.

We thank you for your early steps making Maryland a leader in civilian public health measures. But, more is needed to protect Marylanders in correctional custody. For this reason, MAJR also urges you to take the primary steps as recommended by faculties of Johns Hopkins Schools of Public Health, Medicine and Nursing, as well as Community-Oriented Correctional Health Services, and the Vera Institute, stated below.

Prioritize prevention first and foremost. To reduce contact between people, corrections authorities and other detention administrators should:

- 1. Use their authority to release as many people from their custody as possible. States that do not allow for discretionary releases should adopt these policies on a temporary basis as well as implementing medical furloughs.*
- 2. Work with court administrators to identify for immediate release people in detention who are at high risk of being affected by coronavirus, including people who are 55 years and older, those who are pregnant, and those with serious chronic medical conditions.*
- 3. Partner with community providers to connect people leaving custody with medical care, housing, and other essential services.*

By releasing inmates who are: 1) nonviolent, 2) elderly (and, therefore, low risk), 3) medically-impaired (and, therefore, at greater risk), and 4) arrested only for technical violations of probation or parole, Maryland prisons and jails both can avoid unnecessary deaths in custody and can enable greater resources and "distancing" for remaining incarcerated population. Appropriate requirements for housing, electronic supervision and Medicaid coverage also reasonably may be required.

Thank you again for considering these important public health measures for incarcerated Marylanders.

Best,

Stuart O. Simms
DPSCS Secretary (1997-2003)