

March 19, 2020

Governor Raimondo,

We are a collective of community organizations, faith leaders, and elected officials in Rhode Island calling on Rhode Island leadership to act immediately to protect the lives of people affected by the criminal justice system, as well as the safety of the state of Rhode Island. The spread of COVID-19 is a national emergency that could lead to the deaths of between 200,000 and one million people. It is our responsibility to do everything in our power to reduce the spread of this disease and make our communities safer. As such, the undersigned organizations are demanding that the state take immediate measures to protect vulnerable community members.

Governor Raimondo, the Department of Corrections, and the Department of Health should take the following actions to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19 within all jails, prisons, and detention centers and in the communities in which they are located:

- Release to the public the existing plan and procedures in place to address COVID-19 within state and federal prisons. Such a plan must include how necessary functions and services will continue if large numbers of staff are out with the virus. The plans for an outbreak must also include how necessary tasks performed by prisoners will continue if large numbers of prisoners become ill.
- Reclassify to community confinement all eligible prisoners, including those who are within 6 months of completing their sentence.
- Immediately place on furlough all elderly and medically vulnerable populations; temporarily lift 14-day statutory limit for furlough.
- Expedite grants of parole to anyone generally eligible under R.I.G.L. ch. 13-8; grant medical parole to medically vulnerable prisoners under Governor's emergency powers.
- Ensure that there are sufficient medical beds and enough prison staff to ensure safety for staff, those incarcerated, and visitors. This should not result in prolonged, widespread lock-downs or prolonged use of solitary confinement.
- Provide soap, undiluted CDC-recommended hand sanitizer, medical care, comprehensive sanitation and cleaning of facilities and other safety measures free of charge as recommended by the CDC for those who remain incarcerated.
- Immediately eliminate medical co-pays and forward to the Policy Unit a recommendation that the medical co-pay policy be permanently amended.
- Inform all staff and incarcerated people about the virus and the measures they can take to minimize their risk of contracting or spreading the virus, including education on the

importance of proper handwashing, coughing into their elbows, and social distancing to the extent they can. Information about the spread of the virus, the risks associated with it, and prevention and treatment measures must be based on the best available science.

- In lieu of visitation, persons confined or detained must have free access to phone calls and mail services. Phone calls and mail services should continue through this period, and facilities should maintain proper sanitation practices for common phone equipment.

Governor Raimondo, Attorney General Neronha, the RI Police Chiefs Association, the State Troopers, the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, and Mayor Elorza should take the following actions to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19 within the communities in which they are located:

- Cease all contacts, stops, and warrant enforcements unless there is a reasonable imminent concern for public safety.
- Cease arrests for all nonviolent offenses.
- Cease taking people into custody, except as a last resort.
- Maximize use of cite and release for as many offenses as possible within a jurisdiction's policies.
- Even when necessary to place a person under arrest, have all arrestees screened by a medical provider for possible COVID-19 exposure before the person is taken to the local jail/booking facility in order to limit/prevent the potential spread of COVID-19.
- Provide all patrol officers with sufficient sanitizing products and one-page information sheets about COVID-19, for both their own use and to provide to people they encounter on the job.
- Ensure all patrol officers and other officers who interact with the public have access to sufficient testing and education about the virus for themselves, and other prompt medical care if needed.
- Ensure all employees in their command are aware that they should not report to work if they themselves are feeling any symptoms and that any leave will be fully compensated.
- Release to the public the existing plan for each law enforcement agency for how it plans to assist the public with combatting COVID-19 and with the steps it is taking to ensure the health and safety of the community and all officers.

Governor Raimondo, Attorney General Neronha, and The Chief Judges of the Courts should take the following actions to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19 within the courts and the communities in which they are located:

To the extent allowable under law:

- Follow [these guidelines](#) for keeping the community safe, both in and out of jail, when considering bail applications and post-conviction motions to modify sentences.
- Default to noncustodial sentences wherever possible, including resolutions that avoid immigration detention where outbreak potential is highest.
- Decline to issue "failure to appear" warrants or "bench warrants."

- If requested by defense counsel, agree to waive clients' appearance for status court dates (for people both in and out of custody).
- Continue to eliminate all probation, parole, and pretrial meetings; court-ordered classes; in-person drug testing; collection of court debt; and modify all reporting conditions to phone-reporting.
- Release persons held in pre-trial detention, as well as those held on bail or bond and those held for fees and fines.
- Cancel probation or parole revocation hearings based on technical violations upon request of defense counsel and release those held in custody pending hearings on signature bonds.
- Ensure that people in custody receive a constitutionally-mandated speedy trial.
- Direct any failures to comply with local quarantine orders to the civil court system, not the criminal court system.
- Press prosecutors for a public health/COVID-19-informed justification for any actions/requests that would bring folks into courthouses, jails, and prisons. Ensure those justifications are on the record for public scrutiny.
- Extend unlimited paid sick leave to all employees that work at the court.

Please let us know when you have received this communication. We would like to discuss as a collective with your office these demands at your earliest convenience.