

Missouri CURE

Help End Mass Incarceration!

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March 26, 2020

Open Letter to Governor Michael Parson

Dear Gov. Parson:

As you know, we're all being inundated with messages, advice, news and recommendations about the current Coronavirus crisis. We're glad to see this modern plague being taken seriously.

As a prisoners' rights organization, we in Missouri CURE are particularly concerned with conditions in Missouri prisons, where an outbreak would prove disastrous due to close quarters. Combined with the close quarters, regular physical contact between guards and prisoners, and the underlying chronic health conditions of many confined people, the potential for a rapid spread of the disease is exceptionally high.

Especially now that the COVID-19 virus has been confirmed inside a Missouri prison, We urge that the MDOC institute policies to ensure that prisoners have the necessary tools and equipment to at least try to protect themselves and others. I'm aware that hand sanitizer has been considered contraband because the alcohol can be extracted. However, it is imperative that prisoners have the wherewithal to maintain cleanliness with soap and water and, when this is not available, hand sanitizer. I've been told that at MCC guards are squirting hand sanitizer into prisoners' hands. While this is better than nothing, it will be virtually impossible to ensure that this policy is being practiced at all the prisons in all circumstances. Hand sanitizer dispensers should be available at all times and places where prisoners do not have access to soap and water.

Guards should be wearing gloves and masks at all times, since they are the greatest source of infection. Cleaning solution, including bleach, must be available at all times of full strength that will ensure protection.

In order to reduce the risk of serious illness or death in Missouri prison facilities, we join with the ACLU-MO and organizations such as the Arch City Defenders in calling for the following actions:

- Administer COVID-19 testing and/or temperature checks *to all staff, volunteers, vendors, and everyone else who enters prison facilities*
- Administer temperature checks and COVID-19 testing and, if necessary, treatment to all prisoners who are particularly vulnerable (due to age, underlying health conditions) and prisoners in high risk areas

Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants

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- Release from prison individuals who are particularly vulnerable to appropriate community facilities, (including people over 60, pregnant women, immunocompromised persons), those eligible for release or parole within the next two years, non-violent offenders, and those who have become rehabilitated and “aged out” of crime
- Release all individuals held on technical parole violations (alleged or proven)
- Increase access to fresh air spaces with safe social distancing for all confined
- Provide a nutritious, vitamin-rich diet
- Provide additional soap, uninterrupted running water, hand sanitizer, and effective cleaning supplies at no cost to the individual
- In the absence of facility visits, guarantee that outsourced services through JPay and Securus will be continued and all phone calls, emails, and other forms of contact with loved ones be made available to prisoners at no cost
- Provide appropriate protective gear to all facility personnel, as well as to prisoners (masks, gloves)
- Implement regular and ongoing testing of all personnel
- Ensure that those currently kept in administrative segregation or protective custody do not have to double-cell and/or share toilets, soap, utensils, or bedding
- Ensure materials related to COVID-19 are accessible in multiple languages
- Train custody/direct service staff to identify COVID-19 symptoms and quarantine procedures
- Ensure medical programs are fully staffed to test and treat prisoners and all those being released
- Ensure all quarantine areas are accessible and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Extend unlimited paid sick leave to all facility personnel that have been diagnosed/infected

We in Missouri CURE applaud the steps that have been taken to protect our loved ones, such as providing two free 10-minute phone calls weekly in the absence of visitation, stepping up cleaning procedures, and designating former wings of housing units as quarantine areas for when/if they become necessary. We know that state officials such as you and Director Precythe have a daunting task in making prisons safer at this critical time. Thank you for your careful attention to this mammoth undertaking.

Sincerely,

Hedy Harden

Edna (Hedy) Harden, Chair

Cc: Director Anne Precythe, MDOC
Missouri Legislators
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