

# katal

CENTER FOR HEALTH,  
EQUITY, AND JUSTICE

28 September 2020

**Ned Lamont**  
**Governor of Connecticut**  
**Connecticut State Capitol**  
**Hartford, CT**

**Dear Governor Lamont:**

As you reconvene the State Legislature for another Special Session this week, we were disappointed that one important issue was not on the action list: the impact of COVID-19 in Connecticut jails and prisons. In the midst of the most serious public health crisis in our generation, the State has yet to develop a clear, transparent, comprehensive plan to protect the lives people incarcerated in Connecticut during a pandemic like COVID-19. The crisis compels action and should be part of this Special Session.

The Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice is a Connecticut-based community organization working for racial justice by building community leadership and ending mass incarceration and the war on drugs. Our members are people who are formerly incarcerated, family members of people currently incarcerated, and concerned neighborhood residents. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have been demanding that your administration take action to save lives of people in jails and prisons in our state.

Public health data show that jails and prisons are incredibly susceptible to the spread of COVID-19. As jails and prisons are congregate living conditions, they are incubators of contagions. Due to close quarters and unsanitary conditions, it has been impossible for people inside to effectively follow the [CDC guidelines](#) of physical distancing and regularly washing hands and sanitizing in order to prevent the spread. This reality is affirmed by [substantial epidemiological research](#) showing that over-incarceration increases the contagion rates of infectious diseases and infectious disease deaths – both for people incarcerated and for the larger community.

The Connecticut Department of Corrections has a [poor track record](#) when it comes to preventing the spread of dangerous diseases, and there are constant concerns over [staffing shortages of medical professionals](#). Incarcerated people suffer disproportionately from chronic health conditions that make them vulnerable to the virus, especially as they are already receiving substandard medical care.

With the unprecedented nature of this pandemic, normal constituency plans will not suffice and we must build comprehensive COVID-19 specific plans. Thus far, 1,558 incarcerated individuals have tested positive for COVID-19, with 7 individuals having

passed away due to the virus. The number of known cases of COVID-19 in correctional facilities in the state per 10,000 is [925% higher](#) than the number of known cases of the virus in Connecticut overall. It is clear that we must do better and implement measures that will protect individuals incarcerated, correctional officers, and the larger community.

As we enter the fall, we must make sure the Connecticut Department of Corrections is planning and preparing for a potential second wave of COVID-19. Our state needs a pandemic plan for correctional facilities. In New York, the State Senate held a joint public hearing on the impact of COVID-19 in prisons and jails, which we testified at last week. Currently, Connecticut has not held a hearing of this kind even as more than 10% of the total prison and jail population in the state has tested positive for COVID-19. Even more, Connecticut is among the [top-10 worst states](#) in the country in terms of COVID-19 rates per capita of incarcerated individuals. We cannot wait for more needless deaths, we must act urgently to put in place preventative measures to ensure safety and justice for all, particularly those in the most vulnerable settings -- jails and prisons.

**To save lives and keep people safe, the issue of COVID-19 in jails and prisons should be taken up in the Special Session – the State must:**

- Implement an aggressive plan for emergency release of people from jails and prisons in Connecticut.
- Include COVID-19 testing and monitoring for every incarcerated individual and DOC staff member in each facility that accounts for delayed symptomology and asymptomatic carriers.
- Provide PPE, soap, and hand sanitizer for people detained in CT jails and prisons to assist reducing the spread of COVID-19.
- Immediately eliminate the practice of transferring incarcerated people to Northern Correctional Institution and provide proper medical care for incarcerated people that does not subject individuals to conditions of solitary confinement or inhumane isolation.
- Ease the housing restrictions for incarcerated people upon their release, ensuring that they can identify safe and stable housing. In addition, the state should coordinate non-congregate housing arrangements using existing space throughout the state.
- Require the DOC to make their plans for prevention and management of COVID-19 in each correctional facility publicly available with oversight by an independent body of health experts.

These demands are not new. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in CT in March, we at Katal, with other community groups and public health experts, have demanded, through [letters](#), [demands statements](#), and [actions](#) that you use your executive authority to take action to protect people who are incarcerated, including by immediately releasing people from Connecticut jails and prisons to reduce the impact of the virus. We have repeatedly requested a meeting to discuss our concerns, and your office has twice [cancelled on us](#), without rescheduling. That is unfortunate, because you would benefit

by hearing the stories of our members: individuals, families, and the community members most impacted by the risks of COVID-19 behind bars. If you took the time to meet with these directly impacted CT residents, you would better understand how to create effective public policies that center the most vulnerable and at-risk individuals of our state. Yet you have repeatedly shown disinterest in the concerns and experiences of people, especially people of color, impacted by mass incarceration.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our concerns with you, but more urgently we call you to take immediate action to save lives of people in jails and prisons in our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lorenzo Jones".

Lorenzo Jones, Co-Executive Director  
Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice

CC

Paul Mounds, Chief of Staff to Governor Lamont  
Representative Brandon McGee, Co-Chair of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus  
Representative Geraldo Reyes, Co-Chair of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus  
Senator Gary Winfield, Co-Chair of the Judiciary Committee  
Representative Steven Stafstrom, Co-Chair of the Judiciary Committee  
Representative Matt Ritter, House Majority Leader