

FREE THEM NOW

COVID-19 in Connecticut Prisons and Jails: #FreeThemNowCT

As Connecticut continues to confront COVID-19, Governor Ned Lamont and state officials have failed to develop a comprehensive plan to tackle the crisis of the novel coronavirus in jails and prisons. As a result, COVID-19 continues to spread in correctional facilities in Connecticut—and deaths of incarcerated people continues to rise.

Jails and prisons are notorious incubators of contagions due to close quarters and unsanitary conditions. This puts incarcerated people and Department of Correction (DOC) staff at heightened risk for COVID-19—and jeopardizes community members *outside* of jails and prisons as well.

Across the U.S., prisons and jails remain among the top cluster sites in the country. As of January 21st, 2021, more than 510,000 people in jails and prisons nationwide have tested positive for COVID-19, and at least 2,200 incarcerated individuals and correctional officers have passed away due to COVID-19.¹ This is one reason public health experts have called for decarceration to protect incarcerated people *and communities outside of jails and prisons* from COVID-19.²

Governor Lamont has failed to take comprehensive action to protect the lives of people incarcerated in jails and prisons. As of January 29, 2021, there were over 3,735 incarcerated people that have tested positive for COVID-19 in state prisons and jails, with 19 incarcerated individuals passing away due to COVID-19.³ According to The Marshall Project, Connecticut ranks among the worst in the country in terms of COVID-19 cases per capita of incarcerated individuals.⁴

Funding for medical care for incarcerated people in the DOC's budget has declined steadily since 2008.⁵ Since 2008, the DOC has been sued several times for medical negligence, which only highlights how unprepared the Department is to handle the virus.⁶ In 2019, Tianna Laboy, who was detained in York Correction Institution, was forced to give birth in the toilet of her prison cell because the facility did not have a full-time OB/GYN on-site.⁷



To save lives and keep people safe, Connecticut needs a comprehensive pandemic plan for people incarcerated in jails and prisons. Such a plan must:

- Implement an aggressive plan for emergency release of people from jails and prisons in Connecticut. Mike Lawlor, former chair of the Judiciary Community and the former Undersecretary for Criminal Justice for the state Office of Policy and Management, has noted how, from the start of the crisis until the start of June, the Department of Corrections “could safely reduce (the prison population)” by “4,000 and been that aggressive and not created any problems in the community.”⁸
- 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.⁹
- Provide all incarcerated individuals access to the COVID-19 vaccine, with an immediate focus on elderly people over the age of 55 and medically fragile people or people with compromised immune systems.
- Provide PPE, soap, and hand sanitizer for people detained in CT jails and prisons to assist reducing the spread of COVID-19.
- Eliminate the practice of putting incarcerated individuals who test positive for COVID-19 in 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.

Governor Lamont could enact such a plan immediately, but has failed to do so. In the absence of his leadership, the State Legislature should pass legislation to require the Governor to develop and implement such a plan.

IT IS TIME TO FREE THEM NOW.

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¹ Coronavirus in the US: Lastest Map and Case Count: The New York Times (Jan. 2021), available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html>
² Brie Williams and Leann Bertsch, A Public Health Doctor and Head of Correction Agree: We Must Immediately Release People From Jails and Prisons: The Appeal (Mar. 2020), available at: <https://theappeal.org/a-public-health-doctor-and-head-of-corrections-agree-we-must-immediately-release-people-from-jails-and-prisons/> and Giovanni S.P. Malloy, Lisa Puglisi, Margaret L. Brandeau, Tyler D Harvey, and Emily A. Wang, The effectiveness of interventions to reduce COVID-19 transmission in a large urban jail: medRxiv (June 2020), available at: <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.06.16.20133280v1>
³ Connecticut State Department of Corrections, Coronavirus Information, available at: <https://portal.ct.gov/DOC/Common-Elements/Common-Elements/Health-Information-and-Advisories>
⁴ The Marshall Project, A State-by-State Look at Coronavirus in Prisons, available at: <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2020/05/01/a-state-by-state-look-at-coronavirus-in-prisons>
⁵ Jacqueline Rabe Thomas and Clarice Silber, Denied: A look into inmate health care: CT Post (Dec. 2018), available at: <https://www.ctpost.com/politics/article/Denied-A-look-into-inmate-health-care-13480341.php>
⁶ Josh Kovner, Latest Prison Death Lawsuit Cites Deficient Care Behind The Walls: Hartford Courant (July 2018), available at: <https://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-news-prisoner-death-medical-malpractice-0728-story.html>
⁷ Jenna Carlesso, Inmate who delivered baby in prison cell sues state for denying medical care: CT Mirror (Mar. 2019), available at: <https://ctmirror.org/2019/03/04/inmate-who-delivered-baby-in-prison-cell-sues-state-for-denying-medical-care/>
⁸ Lisa Backus, Federal Settlement Reached On Reducing Prison Population To Prevent COVID Spread: CT New Junkie (June 2020), available at: https://www.ctnewsjunkie.com/archives/entry/20200607_federal_settlement_reached_on_reducing_prison_population_to/?utm_source=CTNewsJunkie+Main+List+With+Publication+Groups&utm_campaign=99ad5ec709-MCP_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a493d2308d-99ad5ec709-95954025
⁹ Yale Medical, Public Health and Nursing Faculty, Letter on COVID in CT Prisons/Jails: (April 2020), available at: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1frm8ULLwt1Bww-oLnEasM8UyQnmXp6qX7Vu1XYoMAE/edit>