



March 13, 2020

Secretary Ralph Diaz
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
1515 S Street
Sacramento, CA 95811

RE: Coronavirus Prevention and Control in California Prisons

Dear Secretary Diaz:

As you are surely aware, prisons are high-risk environments for the spread of viruses and deaths from complications of viral infections due to high-density conditions, concentrations of people with a high risk of complications (elderly or those with chronic health problems), and continual interaction with people from the outside world (correctional staff, contractors and volunteers). CDCR should plan and act proactively to prevent or slow COVID-19 coronavirus outbreaks in its facilities while respecting the rights of all those affected. **We urge CDCR to release vulnerable populations and otherwise employ common sense sanitation and hygiene solutions without unduly restricting incarcerated persons' programming, privileges, or visits.**

Allow Prison Visits

We question the necessity of cancelling regular visits in CDCR facilities as a means of controlling the introduction and spread of the coronavirus COVID-19. Many more staff members, contractors and volunteers enter and exit CDCR facilities every week than the few family and friends who can manage and afford to take the often long and expensive trip to visit their incarcerated loved ones. Staff members enter every area of the facility and come into contact with all of the people incarcerated there. **Visitors only enter restricted areas that can easily be sanitized, and all people entering and exiting those areas – incarcerated people, visitors and staff alike – can be directed to wash or sanitize their hands before they enter and leave. Anyone showing symptoms can be given a face mask or if absolutely necessary excluded.** The threat of COVID-19 contagion is no excuse for denying incarcerated people and their loved ones the opportunity to maintain their family connections, which is crucial for their emotional health and for incarcerated people's rehabilitation and successful reentry into society.

To the extent visits might at some point need to be restricted based on sound public health advice, **modified or restricted visits or communications should be allowed, including noncontact visits and free phone or video visits.** The current elimination of noncontact visits seems particularly and gratuitously punitive as a contagion-prevention measure.

Release Those at High-Risk of Complication in Case of Outbreak

CDCR should take special care to avoid contamination of those incarcerated persons who are at high risk of complications from a COVID-19 infection: people over 60 years old; people with heart or lung conditions, diabetes, cancer, or compromised immune systems; and pregnant

Also, prisoner should have access to **plentiful disinfectant and cleaning supplies** to sanitize their cells.

Hygiene: The Influenza Protocol repeatedly emphasizes the importance of hand washing. Our members report that the amount of soap dispensed by CDCR is often inadequate. **We urge CDCR to double the amount of soap provided to incarcerated people until the pandemic has passed, without regard to ability to pay.** We also urge CDCR to **make plentiful hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes available** wherever a handwashing facility with soap is not readily accessible, including in visiting rooms.

Exclude sick staff and other community members: Staff, volunteers, contractors and other people entering CDCR facilities from the outside world **should be screened for symptoms and for exposure to people with symptoms, and should be required to wash or sanitize their hands or wear clean gloves when they enter the facilities.** Those showing symptoms or reporting exposure to people with symptoms should be **required to stay home.**

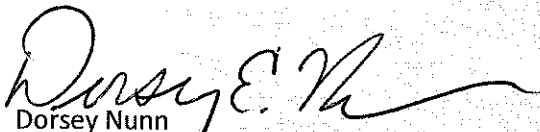
3) Transparency about Prison Policies and Virus Detection: Transparency inspires trust. We therefore urge CDCR to:


- **Publicly identify the people who are making the department's COVID-19 prevention policies**, a team that must include public health experts;
- **Publicly release anonymized data on COVID-19 testing results by facility** for staff and incarcerated people; and
- **Publicly announce isolation, quarantine and other measures** taken to prevent the spread of the virus.

Lockdowns are Not the Answer

We applaud CDCR for taking preventive action in response to the coronavirus pandemic. However, aggressive sanitation, hygiene, and exclusion measures, in addition to the isolation/cohorting and quarantine procedures outlined in the Influenza Protocol, should make it **unnecessary to lockdown facilities** in response to the threat or reality of a COVID-19 outbreak. Incarcerated people should not be made the scapegoats of an inadequate prophylactic response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,


Dorsey Nunn
Executive Director, LSPC


Hafsa Al-Amin
California Coalition for Women Prisoners

Encl: "California Seasonal Influenza Infection Prevention and Control Guidance" (rev. August 2019)

cc: Governor Gavin Newsom
Senator Nancy Skinner, Chair, Public Safety Committee
Assemblymember Reginald Byron Jones-Sawyer, Sr., Chair, Public Safety Committee