The effect of the Coronavirus pandemic on individuals incarcerated in the U.S. has shed light on the vulnerability of this population, the abysmal conditions in which they are kept, and the complete failure by officials to see and treat them as human beings.

The following timeline documents an 11-day period. In the blue boxes, you’ll find the work of advocacy groups, demanding relief in the form of release and hygiene. In the orange boxes, you’ll find actions taken by local, state and federal officials in the criminal justice system. Almost the entirety of the initial response by officials consists of suspending visits. But, like most prison contraband, outside materials get in mainly through the staff, not visitors who are screened and restricted. You’ll see the cases of infections (red circles) begin with staff. You’ll also see a flurry of government activity as the virus begins to appear at state and federal prisons, as officials rush to contain a viral bomb they have already ignited.

For context, the first case of Coronavirus in the U.S. was reported on January 20 and the first Coronavirus-related fatality was on February 29. On March 9, after death toll doubled in one weekend, Iran says it will release 700,000 prisoners. Confirmed cases in the U.S. reach 1,000. The only action taken by correctional facilities in the US to date is the suspension of visitation, with the exception of legal visits, in Nevada.

**March 10**

**ILLINOIS**

Criminal justice advocates call on Gov. Pritzker to release as many elderly, disabled and medically frail people from prison as possible before they may be affected by the new coronavirus. There were nearly 7,800 state prisoners age 50 or older at the end of 2019, making up around 20% of the Illinois prison population.

**NEW JERSEY**

Personal visits at correctional facilities are suspended. Legal visits are allowed.

**LOUISIANA**

Orleans Parish public defenders call on courts to immediately release from jail people held for non-violent offenses.

**March 11**

**MARCH 11**

World Health Organization declares COVID-19 pandemic as virus is reported in at least 114 countries and kills more than 4,000 people.

**CALIFORNIA**

SFDA directs staff not to oppose motions to release detainees facing misdemeanor charges or drug-related felony charges.

The LA Sheriff says he will use his authority to obtain early releases.

Indiana, Colorado, Florida, Rhode Island and West Virginia suspend personal visits at all correction facilities.
CORONAVIRUS AND THE U.S. SYSTEM OF MASS INCARCERATION

ACTIONS TAKEN BY ADVOACY GROUPS

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U.S. President Donald Trump declares national emergency and invokes the Stafford Act, freeing up federal funding to combat COVID-19.

More than 40 state and local advocacy groups urge LA County officials not to wait until COVID-19 has entered a jail facility to take protective steps. LA County jails are the most populated jails in the country and individuals crowded into each facility are medically vulnerable and held in close contact with each other, without adequate access to water and soap.

Twenty-seven advocacy groups, including Legal Services for Prisoners with Children and California Coalition for Women’s Prisoners, petition the governor to immediately release certain categories of people into parole supervision under the Emergency Services Act. The categories include medically fragile adults, adults over the age of 60 and people who have an anticipated release dates in 2020 and 2021. It also urges the expedition of the commutation process; the suspension of parole meetings and revocation for technical violations; the lifting of fees for calls to family members; and that CDCR provide a comprehensive plan of action.

LSPC and CCWP send a separate letter to Gov. Newsom and the Public Safety Committee Chairs for the CA Senate and Assembly, Nancy Skinner and Byron Jones-Sawyer, urging them to reconsider the cancellation of visits, highlighting the fact that more staff come in and out of facilities than visitors.

Juvenile justice organization in the East Bay pen letter to Alameda County probation urging the release of youth who don’t pose a safety risk. They also ask for the diversion of more youth to community-based organizations.

Advocacy groups in St. Louis send a letter to local and state officials outlining additional challenges the virus raises for incarceration and recommends policies directed towards safeguarding individuals’ well-being.

Washington, Utah, Kansas, Delaware, Tennessee, South Dakota, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, Mississippi, Louisiana, Oregon and North Dakota suspend personal visits.


Shelby County is one of the first jurisdictions to make phone calls and video chat free for people in jail.

Employee at the George W. Hill Correctional Facility (PA) tests positive; 11 prisoners are quarantined.

Inmate tests positive in Ontario County jail (NY), released on bail.

Two prisoners in Santa Clara County jail (CA) quarantined after public defender tests positive.

Two correctional employees in Washington state test positive.

All visitation at federal prisons are suspended, including legal visits. Attorneys may be approved for an in-person visit on a case-by-case basis.

A federal district court in Ohio delays all trials.
**March 14**

**Arizona**

Prison Law Office request that attorneys for the Arizona corrections department immediately provide them and the Court with all plans that the ADC and its healthcare contractor Centurion have prepared for the prevention and management of COVID-19 in the Arizona prison system. This is part of the ongoing federal lawsuit between incarcerated persons being represented by Prison Law Office and the ADC over healthcare for prisoners. (Parsons v. Shinn).

**Ohio**

Judges in Ohio begin holding special sessions to try to settle cases, release prisoners or send them to prison, or release on house arrest.

**New York, Illinois, Kentucky and Iowa** suspend visitation, but legal visits are allowed.

**March 15**

**California**

LA Youth Justice Coalition petitions for the downsizing of juvenile hall, camp, Dorothy Kirby and placement population through a moratorium on custody and immediate releases for all technical probation violations all misdemeanor and low-level felony arrests and bench warrant, all people detained at local, municipal police and school police facilities.

**New York**

Coalition of NYC defense attorneys call on governor and mayor to release individuals at the highest risk of serious health complications if they contract COVID-19. They also urge Chief Judge Janet DiFiore to instruct judges across the state to release anyone held in pretrial detention or solely for administrative reasons.

**March 16**

**Ohio**

New York, Illinois, Kentucky and Iowa suspend visitation, but legal visits are allowed.

**Minnesota**

Public Defender's Office tells staff to demand the release of jail detainees across Minnesota to protect them from the spread of Coronavirus.

**California**

LA sheriff holds a press conference, reporting that over the course of two weeks, the Sheriff’s Department has reduced the jail population by about 617. The sheriff has ordered the release of people who had less than 30 days left on their sentences. He also directed local agencies to cite and release as many suspects as possible.

California suspends overnight visits.

** Arizona**

An inmate at Nash-sau County jail (NY) tests positive for COVID-19 and is translated to a local hospital to be isolated and treated.

**New York**

State suspends all new trials.

**Pennsylvania**

Abolitionist Law Center urges Allegheny County to release those being held pretrial, all individuals with less than 6 months left in their sentence, all individuals incarcerated for misdemeanors, drug possession, sex work, and other nonviolent offenses, as well as pregnant women, individuals over 50 and those at high risk of vulnerability. They also request the county transfer all non-releasable individuals to less restrictive forms of custody, i.e. GPS monitoring and house arrest.

**Washington**

Northwest Immigrant Rights Project and the ACLU of Washington filed a lawsuit for ICE to release people who are vulnerable to COVID-19.

**March 17**

**Arizona**

Prison Law Office and ACLU file a motion in Parsons v. Shinn demanding, among other things, the provision of hygiene and cleaning supplies.

**California**

ACLU National issues letter urging not to book any new arrestees into jail unless absolutely necessary.

**March 18**

**Arizona**

AN Employee at Peninsula Work Release (WA) tests positive.

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With West Virginia reporting its first case, the virus has now hit all 50 U.S. states.

Thirty-one prosecutors pledged to dramatically reduce incarceration in the fight against #COVID19 and for our collective future. They represent over 17 million people in all parts of the country.

**WASHINGTON**

Representatives of 14 groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington, Columbia Legal Services, and Disability Rights Washington call for Gov. Inslee to release thousands of people from Washington prisons, citing fears of a potential coronavirus outbreak in the prison system.

**COLORADO**

ACLU Colorado calls for governor to immediately and safely decrease in the number of people in Colorado’s jails and prisons, dramatically decrease new admissions, dramatically decrease in-person court appearances; and implement evidence-based, humane and rights-affirming measures to protect the health and wellbeing of the prisoners and staff.

**NEW YORK**

An employee at Sing Sing, the state prison in New York, tests positive for COVID-19.

**KENTUCKY**

A staff member is diagnosed for COVID-19 at the Detroit Detention Center, another at Jackson County Probation Office (MI). Two employees test positive at Pensacola jail (FL).

**FLORIDA**

A staff at Santa Barbara County jail (CA) tests positive. More than a dozen employees are sent home to self-quarantine.

**MARYLAND**

A staff member is diagnosed for COVID-19 at the Detroit Detention Center, another at Jackson County Probation Office (MI). Two employees test positive at Pensacola jail (FL).

**MARYLAND**

ACLU Maryland and local advocacy groups request Gov. Hogan issue an executive order urging all law enforcement and correctional agencies, state’s attorneys and members of the judiciary to take every step possible to avoid adding to the number of people incarcerated.

**TEXAS**

LA Times runs an editorial entitled, “Coronavirus makes jails and prisons potential death traps. That puts us all in danger.”

**ALABAMA**

Mercer County jail releases 50 low-level prisoners to free up space to create up to 30 more medical isolation cells.

**COLORADO**

Two probation agents with in Michigan test positive. One works at a suspect holding facility in Detroit.

**WASHINGTON**

Sacramento judge authorizes sheriff to release people in jail with 30 days or less left on their sentences.

**COLORADO**

ICE officials say they will delay arresting immigrants who are not “public safety threats” and will roll back detaining those who fall outside of mandatory detention guidelines.

**MARYLAND**

Baltimore State’s Attorney drops all pending criminal charges against anyone arrested for drug possession, attempted distribution, prostitution, trespassing, minor traffic offenses, open container, and public urination.

**NEW YORK**

In Charlotte, about 50 of the jail’s 1,600 occupants have been scheduled for release, part of an ongoing analysis by judges, prosecutors and defense attorneys of who needs to be in custody during the pandemic.

**MONTANA**

Suspended personal visits, making it the final state to do so.

**OHIO**

ADC announces a set of baseline policies in prisons including distributing free soap.

**ARIZONA**

A corrections officer at Rikers Island (NY) tests positive. Two employees test positive at Pensacola jail (FL).

**MISSOURI**

St. Louis DA rolls out new bail policies to reduce pretrial detention.

**TENNESSEE**

Circuit judge orders all prisoners released on OR bonds.

**TEXAS**

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** COLORADO**

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**March 19**

**New Jersey**
- ICE detainees in Essex County launch hunger strike over coronavirus fears.
- An administrative employee at an Alabama state prison tests positive. The state corrections department does not release the name of the facility at which the employee was working.
- A member of the medical staff at Elizabeth Detention Center in New Jersey tests positive for coronavirus, the first case confirmed by Immigration and Customs Enforcement of an employee contracting the virus.
- Two Rikers (NY) correction officers and a captain test positive for the coronavirus, bringing the total number of infected staff to four. So far, only one inmate has been tested -- he is also infected.

**New York**
- Joint coalition of defenders in NYC call on ICE to cease all detention and release anyone in their custody.
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- Two Rikers (NY) correction officers and a captain test positive for the coronavirus, bringing the total number of infected staff to four. So far, only one inmate has been tested -- he is also infected.

**Pennsylvania**
- Philly DA says he’s working to identify and release people who: are parole eligible; are worthy of early parole; are elderly, ill, and/or infirm; are being held pre-trial for non-violent misdemeanors because they can’t afford bail; are candidates for alternative detention, i.e. house arrest or GPS monitoring; and juvenile offenders who are deemed to pose no threat to public safety.

**California**
- Californians for Safety and Justice sends pledge signed by over 100 organizations to local, state, and federal leaders, asking them to commit to restrict ALL bans on housing, provide more resources for reentry, put protocols in place for people on probation and parole, and stop all ICE raids and deportations.
- Polling by Data Progress shows strong, bipartisan support for dramatically reducing jail and prison populations to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Sixty-six percent of likely voters, including 59% of those who are “very conservative,” said that elected officials should be considering it.

**March 20**

**New York**
- Faith leaders from 165 organizations sent joint letter to Governor Cuomo, Senate Majority Leader Stew- art-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie in strong opposition to any bail reform rollbacks, particularly in light of the current crisis.
- Legislators are considering legalizing marijuana.

**Florida**
- After advocates petition the governor of Louisiana, JPay and Securus announce two free 15-min calls per week, which will replenish automatically each week.

**Illinois**
- Advocates at 17 organizations pen letter to Chief Judge Evnas, urging him to work with decision-makers to immediately depopulate the jail and the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center as much as possible, and stem the flow of new arrests entering the criminal and juvenile systems.

**California**
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TO OUR COMRADES INSIDE:
WE ARE FIGHTING FOR YOU!

RESOURCES

Information on supporting incarcerated people and family members during a crisis:
https://www.beyond-prisons.com/covid19

Coronavirus information for incarcerated people:
Coronavirus Manual - CA Jails

Coronavirus Manual - Federal Facilities

Coronavirus Manual - Other States

Coronavirus Manual - CDCR

Marshall Project:

The Justice Collaborative website:
https://thejusticecollaborative.com/covid-19-policy-shifts/

The Appeal:

End Incarceration (a website tracking changes in incarcerated population levels by state and city):
http://end-incarceration.org/

Ella Baker Center:
https://ellabakercenter.org/COVID19EBC

Western Center on Law and Poverty website:

CDCR website on COVID-19:
https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/covid19/

BOP website on COVID-19:

“Coronavirus and Mass Incarceration” was produced by Paula Lehman-Ewing, Editor at All Of Us Or None, a project of Legal Services for Prisoners with Children. Learn more at prisonerswithchildren.org

LSPC is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization and a designated California State Bar legal support center for Qualified Legal Service Providers. We do not provide direct services or take on individual legal cases. However, we are able to provide informational manuals and referrals to other legal services.

LSPC organizes communities impacted by the criminal justice system and advocates to release incarcerated people, to restore human and civil rights, and to reunify families and communities. We build public awareness of structural racism in policing, the courts, and the prison system, and we advance racial and gender justice in all our work.
Contact us at info@prisonerswithchildren.org