



The Gamaliel Network, a nation-wide network of people of faith and people committed to racial and economic justice, joins everyone else in our nation and world in expressing concern for our public health, especially as it impacts the most vulnerable people among us.

We recognize that the Coronavirus threat is grave. We also recognize that people confined in jails, prisons and detention centers are especially susceptible to the spread of infectious diseases like COVID-19. Given that Corrections staff live in communities with community spread of COVID-19, it is only a matter of time before the virus gets into detention centers, jails and prisons.

In jails and prisons, especially those that are overcrowded, it is impossible for inmates to adhere to the kinds of “social distancing” measures that public health experts recommend to stop or slow the spread of this dangerous and highly infectious virus. What’s more, older and infirm detained people are much more likely to die or be hospitalized due to COVID-19 than their younger, healthier peers.

In this time of emergency, there are some steps that can be taken IMMEDIATELY to lower both the risk and the consequences of a disastrous outbreak of COVID-19 in jails and prisons and detention centers, including minimizing the number of hospitalizations and deaths that will result when COVID-19 eventually finds its way into our those facilities.

In this time of emergency, we must take aggressive and immediate steps to reduce the number of people being held in our prisons, jails and detention centers. There are steps that need to be taken within a week in every jurisdiction in the country. Some of these are:

1. Immediately process, with a presumption of release, every person in prison or jail and immigrant detention center over the age of 65, and everyone over 50 in a high-risk category, for “compassionate release.” These, and those with serious health conditions are the most at risk in the current crisis. They need to be allowed to relocate to a safer place.
2. Parole Boards should immediately release every parole-eligible person with a deferment of 6 months or less, and to rapidly review every case with a deferment of between 6-12 months, with a presumption of release.
3. Departments of Corrections should immediately instruct that no person should be detained for a “technical violation” of rules of Probation, Extended Supervision or Parole. Furthermore, all people currently in detention for a “revocation holds” should be released.
4. Departments of Corrections to move to immediately release all people in prisons who are scheduled to be released within the next six months. This step can reduce prison overcrowding and can help to mitigate the potential public health disaster that could take place in our prisons.
5. Eliminate all pretrial, parole, probation check-ins, ICE check-ins and mandatory appearances at court continuances
6. Immediate suspend all ICE detentions, and release to the community all who are in detention centers awaiting a decision on their status.
7. People awaiting trial need to be released immediately, with no need to post any cash bail.
8. Police and Sherriff’s departments need to minimize arrests, and bring no one into custody unless it is an urgent matter of public safety.
9. Family Courts and Juvenile Divisions need to release all youth from juvenile detention centers who are awaiting detention and adjudication hearings to the care of family and community.

10. Youth who must remain detained must be given increased access to fresh air space while maintaining health and safety protocols. Recommended cleaning and sanitation protocols must be implemented immediately.
11. Family Courts and Juvenile Divisions must cease all in-person hearings immediately, rescheduling when possible or moving to phone or video conference.
12. Most people in detention centers, jails and prisons have family and friends who would take them in. Some, however, do not. State and federal agencies should utilize emergency money to help secure safe housing for those people who will be released that do not have a safe place to live.

There are many more steps that can and should be taken. These, however, are the steps that can be taken today, to reduce the health risks in our detention centers, prisons and jails in a matter of days. We do not have months to plan.

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Gamaliel is a faith-based, multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and non-partisan grassroots organizing network located in 15 states and 44 communities whose mission is: a) to train ordinary people, primarily in low-income communities and communities of color, to effectively participate in the political, environmental, social, and economic decisions affecting their lives; and b) to build a diverse corps of grassroots leaders committed to transforming the systems and structures that perpetuate racial and economic inequity.