

Catholic Prison Ministries

COALITION

We urge state and local authorities to do all they can to respond to the crisis of COVID-19 in jails, prisons, and detention.

Specifically, we would like to highlight the following areas for action:

Health and Safety of Inmates, Detainees and Correctional and Detention Staff: Ensure those who are detained or incarcerated and staff to have access to Personal Protective Equipment, sanitary basics such as soap and sanitizer, on demand COVID-19 testing, free medical care for COVID-19 positive inmates and staff, and adequate data collection of testing results. Overcrowding and Vulnerable Populations: Re-evaluate cash bail and bond programs to limit new admissions to jails and prisons, expand home confinement and early release for individuals approaching the end of their sentences, and immediately expand compassionate release programs for inmates in COVID-19 risk categories. In the immigrant detention context, look to release COVID-19 vulnerable populations and contemplate enrollment of other vulnerable populations, as well as verified asylum seekers into the full spectrum of alternatives to detention. Reduce unnecessary transferring of detainees to other detention facilities.

Mental and Spiritual Well Being of Those Incarcerated or Detained and Staff: Ensure inmates have access to free, unlimited voice and video calls with family, provide tablets and other electronic devices and virtual programming to ensure inmates have access to legal services, educational, addiction, and mental health programming, support virtual chaplaincy ministry for inmates and staff and, where possible, allow chaplains to return to in facility ministry.

Successful Reentry into Society: Lift bans on programs like housing, SNAP, TANF, and other public assistance programs; provide additional funding and staff to help connect inmates to halfway houses, permanent housing, and employment; and provide additional funding for Second Chance Act programming which improves employment outcomes and reduces recidivism. Ensure access to COVID-19 testing and care for all regardless of immigration status. Ensure community organizations who provide post-release services are robustly funded for detainee stabilization after release from detention facilities.

As a Church, we are being challenged to creatively consider ways to be present to people behind bars, returning home, and to corrections personnel to meet their pressing needs. We pray for the safety and protection of all those who are affected by incarceration or detainment, for those who work in correctional and detention facilities and for all of their families and loved ones facing difficulties and challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 virus. Preserving the health and dignity of incarcerated and detained people must not be forgotten.