

May 5, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Transmitted by Email

RE: Adopt provisions to protect, release, and support reentry of incarcerated people in the COVID-19 response package.

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

The undersigned organizations urge you to include in the COVID-19 response package under development now provisions to protect, release, and support reentry of incarcerated people.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals incarcerated in and working at U.S. prisons, jails, and detention centers face a public health crisis due to existing unsanitary and overcrowded conditions of confinement. For the past two months, medical and public health [experts](#) have called for reductions in incarceration levels to limit overcrowding and protect those individuals in custody who are at high risk of serious illness and death from COVID-19. While selected releases have occurred at the federal, state and local level, the actions have been insufficient. Attached, please find for your review a short [summary](#) of specific recommendations for Congress to undertake to accomplish these imperatives.

Incarcerated people and correctional staff remain uniquely vulnerable to infection and failure to reduce incarceration rates overall have resulted in COVID-19 outbreaks and deaths in correctional facilities nationwide. To fully respond to COVID-19, Congress must take immediate action to protect individuals who are incarcerated and working at correctional facilities; incentivize states and localities to reduce the number of incarcerated people and ensure that federal and tribal facilities do the same; and support safe reentry upon release.

If Congress does not respond to the risk of COVID-19 outbreaks at incarceration and detention facilities, it will increase the damage that COVID-19 will wreak on countless lives, impacting families and communities nationwide. It also will prevent the U.S. from fully overcoming the domestic COVID-19 epidemic as individuals both working at and incarcerated in correctional facilities continue to travel between these facilities and the community without support.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Justice Roundtable Reentry Working Group Co-Chair Jenny Collier at jcollier@colliercollective.org, Justice Roundtable Sentencing Reform Working Group Co-Chair Kara Gotsch at kgotsch@sentencingproject.org, or Justice Roundtable Convener Nkechi Taifa at nkechi@thetaifagroup.com.

Sincerely,

ACLU
African American Juvenile Justice Project
Akron Votes
Aleph Institute
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Black Family Summit
Braxton Institute
Bread for the World
Campaign for Youth Justice
CAN-DO Foundation
Center for American Progress
Center for Disability Rights
Center for Law and Social Policy
Church of Scientology National Affairs Office
Coalition for Juvenile Justice
Community Catalyst
Community Healing Network, Inc.
Criminalization of Poverty Project at IPS
CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants)
CURE-DC
Demand Justice
Drug Policy Alliance
Equal Justice USA
Greater Akron Canton Chapter of the National Association of Black Social Workers
Health in Justice Action Lab, Northeastern University
Heartland Alliance
HIRE Network
Human Rights for Kids
Innocence Project
Just Futures Law
Justice For Families
Justice Policy Institute
Justice Strategies
Juvenile Justice Coalition
Law Enforcement Action Partnership
Legal Action Center

Little Piece of Light
Mental Health America
NAACP
National Action Network
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Black Social Workers
National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
National Association of Social Workers
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Churches
National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-Maryland Chapter
National Crittenton
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
National Equality Action Team
National Juvenile Defender Center
National Low Income Housing Coalition
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Operation Restoration
Parent Watch
Pathways to Reentry Committee of the ReThink Justice Coalition
ReThink Justice Coalition
Richmond Association of Black Social Workers
Safer Foundation
StoptheDrugWar.org
Strategies for Youth
Students for Sensible Drug Policy
The Association of Black Psychologists, Inc.
The Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth
The Daniel Initiative
The Justice Roundtable
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
The Sentencing Project
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
Treatment Communities of America
Tzedek Association
Union for Reform Judaism
Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)