



**INTERFAITH  
CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE  
COALITION**

March 25, 2020

President Donald J. Trump  
Attorney General William Barr

As faith-based organizations, we want to ensure that current and formerly incarcerated people are not made invisible in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the issues that we are highlighting we also encourage you to adopt the [comprehensive recommendations proposed by the Justice Roundtable](#), a coalition of over 100 organizations committed to advocating for a transformative and restorative justice system. How our nation addresses this issue reflects our values.

This global health crisis places millions at risk, and those who are incarcerated are in a particularly vulnerable situation. People in prison live in overcrowded and compromised sanitary conditions with limited access to resources that meet the Center for Disease Control's recommended hygiene routines to protect themselves. The impact on those with underlying health issues, including the elderly and those with compromised immune systems, is exacerbated by these conditions. An uncontained outbreak within a penal facility would be catastrophic. As people of faith, we believe that it would be immoral and inhumane to not do everything possible to prevent such fatal outcomes.

Stopping the spread of the virus and saving lives is a global concern. Reducing incarceration levels to limit overcrowding is a means to that end. Accordingly, we urge you to use available mechanisms to release as many people as possible applying the Justice Collaborative's [Decarceral Guidelines](#), including:

- Immediate release of elderly and medically vulnerable people;
- Early release of anyone within 18 months of their release date; and
- Lift of any ban to access social services and housing for people who will be, and who have already been, released.

For the general health of staff and those who are incarcerated we urge penal facilities to:

- Make soap and water readily available and accessible for everyone; and
- Create, release publicly, implement, and enforce a policy, vetted by public health officials for handling COVID-19 within each facility.

Given the limitations to face-to-face visits we recommend the following be made available:

- Free unlimited phone calls;
- Free and unlimited video conference access; and
- Free and unlimited access to emails.

As people of faith, we have a moral obligation to speak on this issue and its impact on the most vulnerable. At this time, COVID-19 is spreading throughout our nation's prisons, which will become the epicenters for horrible outcomes. This crisis lays bare the incredible inequities, limitations and



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healthcare challenges in already overcrowded prisons. Moreover, the pervasive systemic issues of racism and classism are only exacerbated by how those who are incarcerated will be treated during the COVID-19 outbreak. We hereby lift our voices on behalf of and with those who are far too often ignored.

All life is sacred.

Signed

American Friends Service Committee  
Bread for the World  
Christian Reform Church Office of Social Justice  
Church of Scientology National Affairs Office  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
Friends Committee on National Legislation  
Interfaith Action for Human Rights  
Jesuit Conference – Office of Justice and Ecology  
Jewish Council for Public Affairs  
Mennonite Central Committee Washington Office  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
National Council of Churches  
National Religious Campaign Against Torture  
NETWORK: Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness  
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights  
The Episcopal Church  
Union for Reform Judaism  
Unitarian Universalist Association  
United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society

Cc: Speaker Nancy Pelosi

Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell

Minority Leader Charles Schumer