



ORLEANS PARISH PRISON REFORM COALITION

4035 Washington Ave., New Orleans, LA 70125
(504) 264-2189 | opprcnola.org

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

Via Email

To:

Chief Judge Karen K. Herman
Judge Laurie A. White
Judge Tracey Flemings-Davillier
Judge Benedict J. Willard
Judge Paul A. Bonin
Judge Keva M. Landrum
Judge Robin D. Pittman
Judge Byron C. Williams
Judge Camille Buras
Judge Darryl A. Derbigny

Judge Arthur L. Hunter, Jr.
Judge Franz L. Zibilich
Judge Harry E. Cantrell, Jr.
Rob Kazik, Judicial Administrator

Governor John Bel Edwards
Mayor LaToya Cantrell
Darnley Hodge, Compliance Director
Marlin Gusman, Sheriff
Shaun Ferguson, Superintendent of NOPD

**RE: COMMUNITY DEMANDS FOR DECARCERATION IN THE RESPONSE TO THE
CORONAVIRUS COVID-19**

Dear Elected Officials of the City of New Orleans,

As the COVID-19 pandemic drastically alters our lives and endangers our community, people in jails and prisons are among those at greatest risk by the spread of the virus. [In line with CDC recommendations](#) and [the governor's ban on large gatherings](#), we must swiftly reduce the number of people incarcerated in the Orleans Parish Prison (OPP) before it becomes a public health catastrophe for our community.

As concerned citizens, the Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition, along with the undersigned organizations, call upon our elected officials to immediately enact an en banc order, by the

authority of the Criminal District Court Chief Judge Karen Herman, to immediately release (1) people who are being held pretrial who fall into the high-risk categories defined by the CDC, (2) people held for outstanding fines and fees, (3) people arrested for misdemeanor offenses (4) people arrested for a non-violent crime that, under Louisiana statute, would not require a mandatory prison sentence if convicted, and (5) people who are detained on a probation or parole hold, based on an arrest for a non-violent crime for which they would not be mandated to serve a prison sentence if convicted, and who are otherwise in compliance with the terms of their probation or parole.

This action is urgent and necessary for the following reasons:

1. **This is a time of crisis.** [Louisiana has documented its first deaths from the coronaviruses and there are clear indicators of spread within the New Orleans community.](#) During hurricane Katrina, inmates were left for dead as water rose within the OPP. We fear that the coronavirus will make these groups' detention into a death sentence similar to the time when inmates were abandoned in OPP. You have the power to prevent this.
2. **Our community members inside of the jail are human and deserve to be treated humanely.** The lack of access to adequate medical care in the jail is notorious and well documented. The jail is already under a federal consent decree due to inhumane conditions, lack of quality medical care, and improper sanitation, and the most recent jail monitor report indicates that the facility continues to struggle with health care for those inside. The coronavirus crisis will undoubtedly exacerbate the conditions inside OPP, underscoring the need to release people from the facility. We demand that their safety, dignity, and health be prioritized in this time of crisis.
3. **[Carceral facilities are incubators for infectious diseases](#), and the situation inside OPP will affect our community's health on both sides of the jail's walls.** In addition to inadequate access to sanitary and hygiene products, imprisoned people are unable to follow CDC guidance such as social distancing to protect themselves and those around them and to "flatten the curve." People on the inside of the jail will return to our community, including those who are currently incarcerated, OPSO staff, and visitors. Their health will determine our health as a city.

In past emergencies, such as when a Category 3 storm has formed in the Gulf of Mexico, New Orleans has released people from OPP as a public safety measure. This pandemic is an emergency and requires the same amount of attention to preserve the safety of our community members. The Orleans Public Defenders have sent a letter to officials imploring the New Orleans Police Department to halt arrests as part of the effort to stem the spread of the virus, and many other organizations have issued similar demands. We stand with them in sending one message: other [cities are making significant changes to their justice system to minimize risk for their communities](#). Some jails [have released hundreds of inmates due to coronavirus concerns](#). New Orleans must act decisively and quickly do the same.

Sincerely,
The Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition (OPPRC)

Undersigned Organizations

Andrea Armstrong, Professor of Law, Loyola University New Orleans
Abolition Apostles Jail & Prison Ministry
ACLU of Louisiana
BARE NOLA
Birthmark Doula Collective
Black Man Rising
BreakOUT!
Eye on Surveillance
Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC)
Foundation for Louisiana (FFL)
Free-Dem Foundations, Inc.
Hagar's House
Hope House
Innocence Project New Orleans
Jesuit Social Research Institute/Loyola University New Orleans
Jewish Voice for Peace
Justice and Accountability Center of Louisiana (JAC)
Louisiana Center for Children's Rights
Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center
Louisiana Survivors for Reform
Mid-City Neighborhood Organization (MCNO)
Music and Culture Coalition of New Orleans
New Orleans Safety and Justice Community Advisory Group
New Orleans Social Medicine Consortium
Newcomb Prison Project (NPP)
New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice (NOWCRJ)
Operation Restoration
Orleans Public Defenders (OPD)
Our Voice Nuestra Voz
Peace by Piece New Orleans
Power Coalition for Equity and Justice (PCEJ)
Project Ishmael
Promise of Justice Initiative (PJI)
Rethink
Roderick & Solange MacArthur Justice Center
Shift Change
Sisters for Christian Community

Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)
Southerners on New Ground (SONG)
Step Up Louisiana
The ReEntry Mediation Institute of Louisiana
Women With A Vision (WWAV)
Voice of the Experienced (VOTE)
Ubuntu Village
William P. Quigley, Professor of Law, Loyola University New Orleans

Via Email

CC:

Tenisha Stevens, Criminal Justice Commissioner
Councilmember Helena Moreno, At-Large
Councilmember Jason Williams, At-Large
Councilmember Joseph Giarrusso, District A
Councilmember Jay Banks, District B
Councilmember Kristin Palmer, District C
Councilmember Jared Brossett, District D
Councilmember Cyndi Nguyen, District E

Congressman Cedric Richmond, 2nd Congressional District

State Representative Gary Carter, District 102
State Representative Mack Marcel Cormier, District 105
State Representative Royce Duplessis, District 93
State Representative Aimee Adatto Freeman, District 98
State Representative Raymond E. Garofalo, District 103
State Representative Stephanie Hilferty, District 94
State Representative Jason Hughes, District 100
State Representative Mandie Landry, District 91
State Representative Candace N. Newell, District 99
State Representative Matthew Willard, District 97

State Representative Gary M. Carter, Jr., District 102
State Representative Raymond E. Garofolo, Jr., District 103
State Representative Mack Marcel Cormier, District 105
Senate Member Sharon Hewitt, District 1
Senate Member Joseph Bouie, District 3
Senate Member Jimmy Harris, District 4
Senate Member Karen Carter Peterson, District 5

Senate Member Troy Carter, District 7