

December 18, 2020

Dear Governor Edwards, Secretary LeBlanc, Dr. Lavespere, and the Wardens and Medical Directors of Louisiana's DOC Facilities,

We are medical professionals primarily based in Louisiana who are deeply concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on people incarcerated and detained in jails and prisons across the state, particularly those who are elderly and/or have comorbidities that put them at increased risk of severe symptoms, on-going medical complications, and death. Many of us regularly treat detained and incarcerated patients at hospitals within our communities. We are concerned that the pandemic has delayed or compromised the care of patients with chronic health needs, which may put those patients at even greater risk of severe illness if they contract COVID-19. As board-certified attendings, fellows, residents, and students, we have first-hand knowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has been extremely burdensome on the state's healthcare system and on healthcare professionals generally. We urge you to use all the mechanisms you have in order to release the elderly and sick home to their families or to long-term nursing or care facilities. This will help keep patients, medical and correctional staff, other incarcerated and detained people, and the families in the surrounding communities safer and healthier until the vaccine is widely available.

Louisiana has been and continues to be at the top of the list of states devastated by COVID-19 infections. At the beginning of the pandemic, in March, a study from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette reported that COVID-19 cases grew at a 67.8% rate, the highest rate in the U.S. By April, the Louisiana Department of Health reported that there were 21,016 cases and 884 deaths in the state attributed to COVID-19. Eight months later, we continue to be plagued by this virus. As of December 10, 2020, Louisiana has had 254,562 confirmed COVID-19 cases, with 6,652 total deaths attributed to COVID-19. This means that, of all states in the US, Louisiana currently sits 5th in COVID-19 death rate per capita at 142 deaths/100,000 population.

By April, the Louisiana Department of Corrections reported that 57 inmates in DOC custody and 45 staff members across the DOC had tested positive. One staff member at LSP had died. As of today, the CDC estimates that there have been at least 4,206 cases and 47 deaths attributed to COVID-19 infection across just 13 of the correctional and detention facilities in the state of Louisiana. These numbers suggest a large amount of spread continues to plague all the DOC facilities as we approach the holidays and the end of 2020. It is not only likely, but expected, that many will continue to become infected, and the growing death rates among inmates and staff will continue during this time.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have learned much about COVID-19 and its progression through our practices. From the beginning, we have known that an individual's immune system is the primary defense against this infection. As a result, people over age 65 years of age and persons

with impaired immunity may have a higher probability of death if they are infected. People on immunosuppressive medication, with diseases causing impaired immunity, or with significant cardiac or pulmonary medical conditions also are at increased risk of death. Younger patients with cardiovascular disease or hypertension may also be at risk for severe disease. This has significant implications for correctional facilities which generally have high rates of hypertension. Persons with severe mental illness in prisons are also at increased risk of acquiring and transmitting infection because they are unable to understand social distancing and hand hygiene and may be unable to communicate symptoms appropriately. Also, by classification, like other prison systems, the DOC facilities house inmates who are elderly, have disabilities, are mentally ill or have severe chronic illness profiles together in specific housing areas, making this population at great risk if one of them becomes infected.

It is within your power to release the elderly and the medically vulnerable held in detention and carceral facilities. Your own task force made recommendations on how to address COVID-19 in prisons and jails that included widespread release. To our knowledge, the suggestions from those experts have not been implemented. Your furlough review panel was disbanded in June after releasing only 0.2% of the DOC population. Over the past month, members of our medical community have formally requested release for individual patients across the different DOC facilities that we have identified as specifically at risk based on their age, medical history, and comorbidities. These patients included a 70-year-old patient with metastatic colon cancer whose estimated life expectancy was less than three months and who has since passed, a 66-year-old patient with uncontrolled Stage 4 Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia, and a quadriplegic patient completely paralyzed from the neck down and who also has a history of diabetes and hypertension. All of these patients are extremely at risk, require serious medical care and/or assistance in activities of daily living, and would be better served at home with their families or in assisted living or care facilities. Releasing them should be a priority. Yet all of our requests for release thus far have gone unanswered.

As providers and future providers of medical care in Louisiana, we cannot in good conscience sit by and watch these patients continue to be needlessly held in jail and prison while the pandemic continues its unrelenting attack on our state, our communities, and our loved ones. **We urge you to seriously consider the release of all elderly and medically vulnerable people from jail and prison. We would all be safer this holiday season if you acted now.**

Sincerely,

Concerned members of the medical community***

Dr. Anjali Niyogi, Associate Professor of Internal Medicine & Pediatrics at Tulane School of Medicine and Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Tulane School of Public Health

Rebecca Nuss, Second Year Medical Student at LSU Health Sciences Center, New Orleans

Ryan Michael Falcone, Master's of Microbiology and Immunology, Third Year Medical Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans

Kyle Mistretta, Second Year Medical and Public Health Student at LSU Health Sciences Center, New Orleans

Judy Fustok, Third Year Medical Student at Tulane School of Medicine, New Orleans LA

Ushma Bhandary, Master of Science in Physiology, Second Year Medical Student at LSU Health Sciences Center, New Orleans LA

Will Boles, Second Year Medical Student at LSUHSC School of Medicine in New Orleans

Domnica Fotino, MD, MPH, Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine at Tulane School of Medicine

Moira Wood, MPH- Second Year Medical Student at Tulane School of Medicine, New Orleans LA

Marcia Glass, MD, Associate Professor of Internal Medicine at Tulane School of Medicine

Anagha Narayanan, First Year MD/MPH Student at Tulane University School of Medicine, New Orleans LA

Nancy Ren, Second Year Medical Student at LSUHSC School of Medicine in New Orleans

Catherine Jones, MD, Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans

Deborah Levy, MD, MSPH, Psychiatry Resident at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans

Ruby Arora, First Year MD Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Tuhin Choudhary, First Year MD/MPH Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Jessi Humphreys, MD, Assistant Professor of Palliative Medicine, University of California San Francisco

Sarah Kelleher, Second Year Medical Student at LSUHSC School of Medicine in New Orleans

Abigail Cahill, First Year MD/MPH Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Aparna Parikh, MD, Assistant Professor Harvard Medical School, Attending Massachusetts General Hospital Division of Hematology and Oncology

Meghan McNeely, Third Year Medical Student at LSUHSC School of Medicine in New Orleans

Neha Dhawan, Master of Public Health, Third Year Medical Student at LSUHSC School of Medicine in New Orleans

Leon Sanders III, Master of Microbiology and Biology, Second Year Medical Student at LSUHSC School of Medicine in New Orleans

Madeline Wegener, First Year MD/MPH Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans

Alexandria Jones, Second Year Medical Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Yinghong Zhao, First Year MD/MPH Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans

Phuoc Le, MD, MPH, Associate Professor of Internal Medicine and Pediatrics, University of California San Francisco

Taylor Bourgeois, First Year MD Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans

Fraya King, Second Year Medical Student at LSUHSC School of Medicine in New Orleans

Mallory Kiefer, Second Year MD Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans

Ryan Basquez, MD, Palliative Care Fellow at Tulane School of Medicine

Nigel Blackwood, First Year MD Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans

Erin Asher, DO, Emergency Medicine and Pediatrics Resident at Louisiana State University in New Orleans

Jonathan Rizner, Second Year MD Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Wyatt Smith, Second Year MD/MPH Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Sandra Freiwald, MD, FACS, General Surgeon, Southern California Permanente Medical Group, San Diego, California

Kirsten Hughes, Second Year MD/MPH Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Rachael Stevens, Third Year Medical Student at Tulane School of Medicine, New Orleans LA

Fiona Sylvies, MS, Second Year MD Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Brandi Sun, Second Year Medical Student at LSUHSC School of Medicine in New Orleans

Emma Newton, MS, Second Year Medical Student at Tulane School of Medicine, New Orleans LA

Jennifer Olenik, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania

Nicholas Meyers, Second Year Medical Student at LSUHSC School of Medicine in New Orleans

M. Matias Iberico, MD MPH DTM&H, Assistant Professor of Medicine, Tulane University School of Medicine, New Orleans, LA

Aimee Aysenne, MD/MPH, Assistant Professor of Neurosurgery, Tulane University School of Medicine.

Mimi Chen, Third Year MD/MPH Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Lea Mascarenas, Master of Science in Physiology, Second Year Medical Student at LSU Health Sciences Center, New Orleans LA

Miranda Hendrix, Second Year Medical Student at LSU Health Sciences Center, New Orleans

Kiersta Kurtz-Burke, MD, MPH

Rachel Trusty, Second Year Medical Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Mardeen Karim, Third Year MD Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Abigail Solomon, Fourth Year MD/MPH Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Rebecca Ramm, MD
Tulane University Internal Medicine PGY2
New Orleans, LA

Cara Coren, Fourth Year MD/MPH Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Lauren Nguyen, Second Year MD/MPH Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Natasha Lee, MD, Chief Resident of Tulane Med-Peds Residency Program in New Orleans, LA

Hannah Daneshvar, Third Year MD/MPH Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Frances Gill, MPH, Fourth Year Medical Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Erica Tate, MD, Instructor of Internal Medicine at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

Sarah Talia Himmelfarb, MD, Resident Tulane-Med Peds Program in New Orleans, LA

Ari Saravia, Second Year Medical Student at LSUHSC School of Medicine in New Orleans

Shreya Gunda, Second Year Medical Student at LSUHSC School of Medicine in New Orleans

Jackson Mierl, Second Year Medical Student at LSUHSC School of Medicine in New Orleans

Jerry Zifodya, MD MPH & TM, Assistant Professor, Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, Tulane University School of Medicine, New Orleans, LA

Klay Noto, Second Year MD/MS Student at Tulane University School of Medicine

Alexis Hernandez, MPH, Second Year MD Student at LSUHSC School of Medicine in New Orleans

Marlowe Moran Maylin, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine, Deming Department of Medicine, Tulane University School of Medicine, New Orleans, LA

Theresa Bui, Second Year MD/MPH Student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, LA

C. Dale Shamburger, MD; Assistant Professor, Internal Medicine. Tulane School of Medicine, New Orleans, LA.

Jason Halperin, MD, MPH; Infectious Disease Clinical Lead, CrescentCare New Orleans, Louisiana

Elizabeth LaRosa, MD, MPH; Emergency Medicine Resident at Louisiana State University in New Orleans

Neil Nixdorff, MD, MPH

Shakira Harding, Second Year Medical Student at LSUHSC School of Medicine in New Orleans

Vinay Krupadev, MD, MPA-DP; Internal Medicine and Pediatrics Resident at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA

Nancy Tran, 4th year Medical Student at LSUHSC School of Medicine - New Orleans

Corey Costantino, MD; Assistant Professor, Internal Medicine. Tulane School of Medicine, New Orleans, LA.

Monica Dhand, MD DTMH, Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine, Tulane University School of Medicine, New Orleans, LA

Phoebe Jensen, MD; Adjunct Instructor of Internal Medicine. Tulane School of Medicine, New Orleans, La.

Celeste Newby, MD,PhD;Assistant Professor, Tulane University School of Medicine, New Orleans, LA.

Daniel Brady, MD; Clinical Instructor, Internal Medicine. Tulane University School of Medicine, New Orleans, LA.

***signatories do not speak on behalf of their affiliated institutions