

April 9, 2020

Governor John Bel Edwards
Office of the Governor
PO Box 94004
Baton Rouge, LA 70804
Via E-mail to: Matthew.Block@la.gov
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Dear Governor Edwards,

As faith leaders across Louisiana, we come together to ask that you exercise moral leadership and use the emergency powers at your disposal to save the lives of those incarcerated. Many of us minister in prisons, in jails and to those who have reentered our faith communities after returning; we know the dangers they face. The large population of elderly and sick incarcerated individuals was a moral stain on our state prior to COVID-19. However, we have run out of time to act.

We ask that you immediately activate the release of the elderly and the vulnerable held in DOC and ICE facilities. The spread of COVID-19 is a global catastrophe on a level that no elected official or policymaker in office has ever experienced before. History will ask how we worked in this moment to prevent suffering and loss of life for all of our community members, especially those we incarcerated.

With the highest rate of incarceration rate in the world, Louisiana has more people serving life without parole per capita than any other state. Many members of our congregations are already affected daily by the absence of loved ones from their lives. While struggling through this difficult time, they have the added hardship of knowing their detained family and friends cannot protect themselves from the rapid spread of COVID-19 while behind bars. We fear those in detention are being sentenced to death despite your power to release them. We fear for those who work as correctional officers, medical staff, chaplains, mental health providers, and all personnel. We are concerned for their families and communities as well. This virus does not know the boundaries of confinement.

We, the undersigned, call upon you to administer emergency powers and protect our most vulnerable before it is too late.

In faith,

Amina Rae Horton, Ordained Minister, Sufi Ruhaniat International, Temple of Universal Worship

Chad Westley

Chaplain C.W. Robinson, OPSO and Orleans Justice Center

Cheryl Mouton, Community Activist, Chairperson Coalition for Justice "Breaking the Chains"

Darrian Johnson

Deacon Joseph Clavijo - Episcopal Church

Diana Collins

Dionell Perkins, Cook and former prison Deacon at Elaine Hunt Correctional Center

Dominique Jones-Johnson, Founder Daughters Beyond Incarceration

Dr. Willie Gable, Jr. President Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Greater New Orleans

Earl Hagans

Eugene Vessel

Fr. Fred Kammer, SJ, Director, Jesuit Social Research Institute, Loyola University

Garreth Payton, Professional Boxer

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Joe Morris Doss, Bishop of the Episcopal Church and Attorney at Law

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Kecia Brownn, LPN

Kiana Calloway

Keith Griffin

Laquenta Hill

Latonia Bickham

marie rinaudo

Michael Cowan, Professor, Loyola University

Min. Leo Jackson Second Zion Prison Ministry

Mollie Diggs

Mrs. Corinne F. Barnwell

Mylan Gibson

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Rev. Dr. Marc Boswell
Rev. Michaela O'Connor Bono, Zen Buddhist Priest, Mid City Zen
Rev. Elizabeth Mangham Lott
Rev. Paul Beedle, First Unitarian Universalist Church of New Orleans
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Sister Bernie Barrett
Sister Shawn Conrad, OSB
Sr. Cecilia Castillo, STJ
The Reverend Gary Brooks, Presbyterian Church, USA, retired
The Reverend Melanie Morel-Ensminger
The Rev. Watson Lamb
Tiffany Galmore
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Wesley E. Bridges, CEO of Clergy For Prison Reform

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