

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/whos-got-the-power-decarcerate-louisiana-covid-19>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

As COVID-19 cases continue to rise, the novel coronavirus remains a threat to incarcerated people. In Louisiana, there are more than 30,000 people serving sentences in prisons and jails. Many people across the state urged the governor, the head of the Department of Corrections and Public Safety (DOC), and local lawmakers to act within their power to quickly and safely release people from jails and prisons. Unfortunately, many, including lawmakers themselves, seem unsure about where that power lies or what it entails. This lack of clarity, coupled with historical reluctance to fix Louisianas mass incarceration crisis, has resulted in minimal releases from jails and prisons.

Urgently decarcerating Louisiana requires an understanding of the legal mechanisms available. This document outlines who has the power to release people incarcerated in Louisiana, where in the law that power lies, and how many people could be released if that power was properly used.

COVID-19 has exacerbated and exposed the fact that far too many people are held in Louisianas jails and prisons.

Elected and appointed officials across branches of Louisianas government each have unique powers to reduce the number of people held in prisons and jails across the state.

During a state of public health emergency, Governor John Bel Edwards has additional authority to mandate release from incarceration.

PUBLICATION

VIDEO

NEWS

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