

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/news/coronavirus-will-spread-wildfire-our-prisons-without-sweeping-action>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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Coronavirus has landed in Ohio's prisons. This is no surprise. That's why the ACLU of Ohio and other advocates have been [urging](#) Governor DeWine, ODH Director Acton, DRC Director Chambers-Smith, and DYC Director Gies for several weeks to use their powers to quickly and safely reduce incarcerated populations across Ohio especially for those most vulnerable. Unfortunately, meaningful reductions have not taken place.

Nearly 20 people in Ohio prisons have tested positive so far. Dozens more tests are pending, and at least one corrections officer has died as a result of complications associated with the coronavirus. As of April 7, 27 staff at four different facilities had tested positive. In a series of announcements, Governor DeWine provided three release recommendations for *select* people in Ohio prisons. It's important to note that this does not guarantee their release.

First, on April 3, Governor DeWine recommended the release of 38 people: 23 women who are either *pregnant* or who recently gave birth, and 15 people over 60 years of age who are approaching their release dates.

On Tuesday, April 7, he used authority that he and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Director Chambers-Smith have for emergency release due to overcrowding. Stakeholders reviewed people in prison with release dates within 90 days or less before screening out those:

This left 141 people living in open bay minimum security facilities who qualify for the recommended emergency release.

Finally, stakeholders reviewed people who may be eligible for release using the Governor's clemency/commutation powers. They looked at people who are 60 years of age and have one or more chronic health conditions before screening out those

This left 26 people who qualify for the release recommendation.

That means Governor DeWine recommended the release of 205 individuals, or .4% of the prison population. While all release recommendations are truly welcome, this is a drop in the bucket of what is needed to mitigate the potential spread of the coronavirus throughout our prison system.

Ohio's prison system has operated over 130% capacity for years. **What will it take to decarcerate Ohio's prisons, jails and youth detention centers?** As of April 8, there are seven Ohio prisons under quarantine, including the Franklin Medical Center and Correctional Reception Center. That means over 10,000 people are quarantined.

We know the coronavirus spreads quickly in closed spaces like nursing homes and cruise ships. Incarceration facilities are no different. These are spaces where people eat, sleep and live in close quarters. Social distancing is impossible, and basic hygiene items are in short supply. We cannot overstate the need for a bold state-level order to directly and meaningfully reduce incarcerated populations. Countless lives are on the line.

[**Tell Governor DeWine to Act Now to Stop Coronavirus in Ohio's Incarcerated Populations.**](#)

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