

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/press-releases/aclu-ohio-governor-dewine-vaccine-rollout-must-include-incarcerated-people>

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COLUMBUS The ACLU of Ohio sent a letter to Governor DeWine regarding his COVID-19 vaccination rollout to ensure incarcerated Ohioans are included in the same tier as all others in congregate living situations, such as nursing homes and psychiatric facilities. DeWine gave a general outline of Ohios distribution plan during a December 4 press conference, but failed to address a population at high risk of contracting the virus and experiencing potentially fatal outcomes: individuals in prisons, jails, and detention facilities.

Ohio has a moral and legal obligation to protect the lives and health of the people that it has chosen to hold as prisoners, noted **Freda Levenson, Legal Director for the ACLU of Ohio**. Moreover, to end this pandemic, Ohios distribution plan should be based on the scientific and public health evidence that dictates that we eradicate all major incubators of COVID-19. There is no valid justification for discriminating among people living in different *types* of congregate living facilities.

As of December 6, at least 9,299 Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction staff and individuals held in ODRC facilities have contracted COVID-19, and at least 116 have died. In May, the ACLU of Ohio and Policy Matters Ohio unveiled an analysis showing the COVID-19 death rate in Ohio prisons was nearly 10 times higher than in Ohios general population.

Ohio remains one of the worst states in the nation for fatality rates of individuals behind bars; by including incarcerated individuals in the immediate vaccination distribution plan Ohio could attempt to rewrite the narrative, added **Jocelyn Rosnick, Policy Director for the ACLU of Ohio**. Furthermore, a disproportionate number of the people in Ohio prisons and jails are Black and Latinx, members of the communities who have already suffered the most in the pandemic. There is no defensible reason to deny these individuals the same degree of priority accorded to residents of other congregate living facilities.

[A copy of the letter is available.](#)

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