

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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COLUMBUS On Friday, March 27, the ACLU of Ohio, the Ohio Organizing Collaborative, Ohio Transformation Fund, and Policy Matters Ohio sent a letter urging state officials to, among other requests, immediately reduce state and local incarcerated populations amid the COVID-19 public health crisis. The advocacy groups offer specific legal tools to safely and quickly reduce the populations and outline immediate steps for each stakeholder: Governor DeWine, ODH Director Acton, DRC Director Chambers-Smith, and DYS Director Gies.

Under Ohio law, there are several ways Governor DeWine and his administration can act expeditiously to release certain members of these populations; however, time is of the essence and we urge our government leaders to adopt all of our recommendations and initiate immediate action, said **Jocelyn Rosnick, Policy Director for the ACLU of Ohio**.

The variety of tools suggested for rapid action include: Director Acton issuing another emergency order, Governor DeWine declaring an overcrowding emergency in state prisons, ordering the Ohio Parole Board to revisit recent parole-release denials, and accelerating and increasing the use of his commutation powers; and Director Chambers-Smith submitting as many 80% Release requests as possible.

"The Ohio Transformation Fund stands with humility and urgency with people behind bars and their loved ones in this public-health crisis. OTF was founded in 2015 to respond to the immediate and long-term crisis of mass incarceration. We exist to support and convene the advocates from all walks of life that are reminding Ohioans that we get more durable community safety when we invest in health, not punishment. There has never been a moment where that is truer than now, said **Ohio Transformation Fund Executive Director Erika Anthony**. "We are heartened by all the steps state and local leaders have taken thus far to protect the health of incarcerated people and all Ohioans. But they must take the reduction of adult and youth incarceration more seriously. There is no time to lose."

The DeWine administration has taken strong steps to protect Ohioans during this crisis, says **Hannah Halbert, Executive Director of Policy Matters Ohio**. Extending that protection to incarcerated people is a critical next step that will benefit everyone in our state.

We cannot overstate the need for a state-level order to directly reduce jail, prison, and youth detention populations. This is the most critical step our government can take to reduce the likelihood of a COVID-19 outbreak in these facilities. We stand by ready to assist in any way we can to make this possible, concluded **Gary Daniels, Chief Lobbyist for the ACLU of Ohio**.

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

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