This letter was written by a person incarcerated at Jamestown.</br></br>

For more than two months now, the world has moved to the drumbeat of increasingly bad news about the coronavirus crisis. The U.S. now leads the world in COVID-19 cases. And few experts say that this war can be won anytime soon. The virus has now moved beyond coats to attack every state. New hot spots emerge, the virus continues to spread unabated and the death rate continues to rise.</br></br>

What has become clear about the virus is that it spreads and wreaks its greatest havoc in crowded spaces. Often a carrier of the virus is asymptomatic and has no idea that he even has it until a week or more, if at all, when symptoms appear. As the number of people inflicted and the number of deaths continue to rise precipitously states, cities, and communities around the country are ordering various forms of social distancing and stay at home orders.</br></br>

As I watch what is taking place around the country I worry for my family, for the country and can only imagine the fear the general public must feel. We appear to be a nation under siege. I am 58 years old and have spent the last 30 years in prison. I am currently incarcerated in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation at Calipatria State Prison. In all of my years in prison I have never witnesses anything affect the prison population (prisoner as well as guards) so dramatically.</br></br>

The society that prisoners created for themselves is a world of its own and over the years you get numb to the violence and cruelty that is so much a part of the prison culture, but the COVID-19 pandemic appears to be a different beast altogether. An unseen enemy that you don’t know how to avoid or fight. Even the most callous of us can’t help but be concerned about what is to come. As the battle against the coronavirus rages on around the country we at Calipatria State Prison has so far been fortunate to avoid the virus.</br></br>

Nevertheless, everyone here knows that it is coming and that when it does arrive it will be like a massive train wreck and a lot of death is sure to follow. Just the nature of the way this virus spreads makes it especially conducive to environments found in nursing homes, close quarters, most often double celled in a small closet sized room and share the same showers, phones, tables and other common areas with the rest of the prison community.</br></br>

Strict social distancing simply isn’t possible in a prison setting. For instance, every year when the flu season rolls around nearly every prisoner will eventually come down with the flu. It’s just impossible to avoid. Thus, when the virus does hit this prison, it will spread throughout the population like a wildfire.</br></br>

Currently the administration has us on a modified program, a kind of lose quarantine where social distancing is encouraged but in practice is unworkable because we all share common areas. Visits, school and religious services have all suspended. Right now, it’s just a waiting game for us. Everyone knows that it is coming we just don’t know when. We have been told that once the virus arrives, we will be completely locked down under quarantine, but prisoners and prison officials alike know that that will not stop the virus, at best it will slow it down.</br></br>

Quarantines in a prison setting are simply unworkable, especially with a virus so aggressive and so deadly. It was only four or five months ago when this prison was placed on quarantine. Everyone was getting sick, and they didn’t know why so until the cause of the outbreak was identified we were placed on quarantine. And then with everyone quarantined there was no one to clean the units regularly.</br></br>

We were only given showers every three days or so but those who had cellies were forced to shower together in the confines of a shower built for one, and the showers went weeks without being cleaned. And, of course, hand sanitizer and disinfectant were unheard of. As the problems continued to build eventually it was discovered to be salmonella poisoning and the quarantine was lifted. But just based on this last experience if we are going to be quarantined for several weeks or months things are going to get real ugly here real fast.</br></br>

The prison system just isn’t designed to handle a pandemic like this. For example, when we get sick here or need to be seen by medical staff for whatever reason we must submit a request in writing describing our problem. It is then twenty-four to 48 hours before we are seen by a health care provider. However, emergency rooms around the country report having patients walk in the front door talking to them and then within hours their symptoms are so severe that they are having to be placed on a ventilator.</br></br>

Here just being seen will take too long, and even if the process were shortened there will be no ventilators for us. Hospitals in the free world are currently being overrun with patients and ventilators are in short supply so the local communities are certainly in no position to take on the tidal wave of prisoners that will eventually become sick. It’s just hard to imagine how widespread death does not occur here and at a much higher rate than the general public.</br></br>

Most prisoners here have resigned themselves to what will come and just hope that they will be among those that survive. We can all see the concern in the eyes of the prison guards here as well, knowing that when it does hit here their lives, and the lives of their families, will be at risk. But you may ask yourself why the general public should be concerned about the lives of men that have taken so much from society? Because every day there are people being released back into your community.</br></br>

It is in societies’ best interest that they are not bringing disease back out into the community. This prison is an incubator for the virus with optimal conditions for it to last long after it has been defeated in your communities. And, if for no other reason, the sheer cost associated with caring for the sick, the prisoners as well as prison officials, will be overwhelming if the virus is just allowed to wreak its havoc.</br></br>

And finally, we are paying our debt to society, some for minor offenses and other more major offense, but none of us were sentenced to death and I would like to think even with all that is going on in the world right now that still matters to most of you.</br></br>