

Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20515

May 6, 2020

Secretary Ralph Diaz
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
1515 S Street #101n
Sacramento, CA 95811

Dear Secretary Diaz,

We write to express deep concern for the staff and inmates in California state prisons and jails during this coronavirus crisis. We understand that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) provided guidance to prisons across the state and appreciate that CDCR continues to work hard to ensure the safety of staff and inmates. Despite these best efforts, there are an increasing number of cases across CDCR facilities.

According to data CDCR publishes, as of May 6, 2020, there were 370 inmates infected with coronavirus across California CDCR institutions. The highest concentration of coronavirus infections is at the California Institution for Men in Chino with 247 confirmed cases and the Los Angeles County's California State Prison with 109 confirmed cases. In April, one individual died in the California Institution for Men likely due to COVID-19. The number of infected employees who serve CDCR or the California Correctional Health Care Services (CCHCS) is also concerning. There were 164 infected employees as of May 6, 2020 across California: 44 at the California Institution for Men in Chino, 35 at the California State Prison in Los Angeles County, and between 1 and 8 employees across the remaining state prisons.

We laud the CDCR for adopting responsive measures, including requiring all staff and inmates to wear face masks and increasing physical distance by staggering recreation time. CDCR's early release of 3,500 nonviolent inmates who were scheduled already to be released is an important step in reducing the coronavirus risk in CDCR facilities. We are, however, alarmed by the increasing infections. Many of our constituents are incarcerated at CDCR facilities, work at CDCR facilities, or have family members incarcerated at these facilities. Incarcerated Californians do not deserve to unnecessarily suffer if there are practices that will reduce the number of inmates in CDCR facilities who are exposed to coronavirus. These policies should be considered, while protecting the community.

So that all our communities can better understand how CDCR is addressing the coronavirus pandemic, we ask that you respond to the below questions.

1. What are CDCR's treatment plans if inmates begin to have severe complications from COVID-19? What guidelines are in place to safely transport inmates infected with the coronavirus to outside medical facilities?

2. Is CDCR considering increasing the number of hospital beds in institutions that have developed high numbers of coronavirus infections?
3. When will the 3,500 individuals selected for pre-release be released? Is the State reviewing whether to pre-release any groups of additional individuals?
4. What specific steps is CDCR undertaking to stop the spread of the coronavirus by recently released inmates? Does the CDCR plan to change its policy of not testing all individuals before they are released? Disaggregated by facility, what percentage of facility inmates have been released since March 1, 2020?
5. How many wrap-around care strike teams are currently in operation? Where are these reentry strike teams in operation? Is CDCR on track to be able to locate housing for all those released and who are at risk for homelessness and housing instable? What other services will these wrap-around care strike teams provide for those recently released? Does this include all individuals under county probation supervision as well?
6. With infection rates rising in certain prisons, what specific changes is the CDCR undertaking to adjust its practices or policies to address rising outbreaks in your facilities?
7. Is CDCR or any outside entity conducting frequent and regular inspections of prisons to ensure that facilities are meeting CDCR guidance and minimizing the risk of spread of COVID-19?
8. Is CDCR tracking the individuals (inmates and staff) who are considered high-risk for severe complications from COVID-19 as defined by the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control?
9. Does CDCR have guidance for prisons on how to respond to inmates who test positive for coronavirus? What does the guidance state? How are inmates who test positive or who may have been exposed to the virus isolated from other individuals?
10. What protocols is CDCR mandating prisons use to ensure social distancing? Broken down by facility, what percentage of inmates are in shared living arrangements?
11. Are there sufficient cloth face masks and other personal protective equipment like N95 masks in CDCR facilities to ensure all inmates, staff, and medical staff are adhering to CDC protocols?
12. Do all CDCR inmates have access, without having to submit a request, to hand sanitizer and soap? How often can staff and inmates wash their hands?
13. Has California applied for federal funding allotted through the CARES Act that can be used to support efforts to prevent and treat COVID-19 in state prisons? If so, what allocation of Byrne JAG funding awarded to the State of California will be used to mitigate risks of COVID-19 infection within CDCR prisons?

We appreciate your assistance in responding to these important questions. Thank you for all the hard work you and your team is putting in day in and day out to address the COVID-19 crisis.

Sincerely,



Norma J. Torres



Mark Takano



Nanette Diaz Barragán



Zoe Lofgren

/s/

Karen Bass

/s/

Alan Lowenthal



Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.



Jerry McNerney



Jared Huffman

/s/

Grace Napolitano



Ro Khanna



Juan Vargas



Barbara Lee

Cc: The Honorable Gavin C. Newsom
Governor of California