



ORLEANS PARISH PRISON REFORM COALITION

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4035 Washington Ave., New Orleans, LA 70125  
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Wednesday, March 18, 2020

*Via Email*

**To:**

Chief Judge Karen K. Herman  
Judge Laurie A. White  
Judge Tracey Flemings-Davillier  
Judge Benedict J. Willard  
Judge Paul A. Bonin  
Judge Keva M. Landrum  
Judge Robin D. Pittman  
Judge Byron C. Williams  
Judge Camille Buras  
Judge Darryl A. Derbigny

Judge Arthur L. Hunter, Jr.  
Judge Franz L. Zibilich  
Judge Harry E. Cantrell, Jr.  
Rob Kazik, Judicial Administrator

Governor John Bel Edwards  
Mayor LaToya Cantrell  
Darnley Hodge, Compliance Director  
Marlin Gusman, Sheriff  
Shaun Ferguson, Superintendent of NOPD

**RE: COMMUNITY DEMANDS FOR DECARCERATION IN THE RESPONSE TO THE  
CORONAVIRUS COVID-19**

Dear Elected Officials of the City of New Orleans,

As the COVID-19 pandemic drastically alters our lives and endangers our community, people in jails and prisons are among those at greatest risk by the spread of the virus. [In line with CDC recommendations](#) and [the governor's ban on large gatherings](#), we must swiftly reduce the number of people incarcerated in the Orleans Parish Prison (OPP) before it becomes a public health catastrophe for our community.

As concerned citizens, the Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition, along with the undersigned organizations, call upon our elected officials to immediately enact an en banc order, by the

authority of the Criminal District Court Chief Judge Karen Herman, to immediately release (1) people who are being held pretrial who fall into the high-risk categories defined by the CDC, (2) people held for outstanding fines and fees, (3) people arrested for misdemeanor offenses (4) people arrested for a non-violent crime that, under Louisiana statute, would not require a mandatory prison sentence if convicted, and (5) people who are detained on a probation or parole hold, based on an arrest for a non-violent crime for which they would not be mandated to serve a prison sentence if convicted, and who are otherwise in compliance with the terms of their probation or parole.

This action is urgent and necessary for the following reasons:

1. **This is a time of crisis.** [Louisiana has documented its first deaths from the coronaviruses and there are clear indicators of spread within the New Orleans community.](#) During hurricane Katrina, inmates were left for dead as water rose within the OPP. We fear that the coronavirus will make these groups' detention into a death sentence similar to the time when inmates were abandoned in OPP. You have the power to prevent this.
2. **Our community members inside of the jail are human and deserve to be treated humanely.** The lack of access to adequate medical care in the jail is notorious and well documented. The jail is already under a federal consent decree due to inhumane conditions, lack of quality medical care, and improper sanitation, and the most recent jail monitor report indicates that the facility continues to struggle with health care for those inside. The coronavirus crisis will undoubtedly exacerbate the conditions inside OPP, underscoring the need to release people from the facility. We demand that their safety, dignity, and health be prioritized in this time of crisis.
3. **[Carceral facilities are incubators for infectious diseases](#), and the situation inside OPP will affect our community's health on both sides of the jail's walls.** In addition to inadequate access to sanitary and hygiene products, imprisoned people are unable to follow CDC guidance such as social distancing to protect themselves and those around them and to "flatten the curve." People on the inside of the jail will return to our community, including those who are currently incarcerated, OPSO staff, and visitors. Their health will determine our health as a city.

In past emergencies, such as when a Category 3 storm has formed in the Gulf of Mexico, New Orleans has released people from OPP as a public safety measure. This pandemic is an emergency and requires the same amount of attention to preserve the safety of our community members. The Orleans Public Defenders have sent a letter to officials imploring the New Orleans Police Department to halt arrests as part of the effort to stem the spread of the virus, and many other organizations have issued similar demands. We stand with them in sending one message: other [cities are making significant changes to their justice system to minimize risk for their communities](#). Some jails [have released hundreds of inmates due to coronavirus concerns](#). New Orleans must act decisively and quickly do the same.

Sincerely,  
The Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition (OPPRC)

Undersigned Organizations

Andrea Armstrong, Professor of Law, Loyola University New Orleans  
Abolition Apostles Jail & Prison Ministry  
ACLU of Louisiana  
BARE NOLA  
Birthmark Doula Collective  
Black Man Rising  
BreakOUT!  
Eye on Surveillance  
Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC)  
Foundation for Louisiana (FFL)  
Free-Dem Foundations, Inc.  
Hagar's House  
Hope House  
Innocence Project New Orleans  
Jesuit Social Research Institute/Loyola University New Orleans  
Jewish Voice for Peace  
Justice and Accountability Center of Louisiana (JAC)  
Louisiana Center for Children's Rights  
Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center  
Louisiana Survivors for Reform  
Mid-City Neighborhood Organization (MCNO)  
Music and Culture Coalition of New Orleans  
New Orleans Safety and Justice Community Advisory Group  
New Orleans Social Medicine Consortium  
Newcomb Prison Project (NPP)  
New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice (NOWCRJ)  
Operation Restoration  
Orleans Public Defenders (OPD)  
Our Voice Nuestra Voz  
Peace by Piece New Orleans  
Power Coalition for Equity and Justice (PCEJ)  
Project Ishmael  
Promise of Justice Initiative (PJI)  
Rethink  
Roderick & Solange MacArthur Justice Center  
Shift Change  
Sisters for Christian Community

Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)  
Southerners on New Ground (SONG)  
Step Up Louisiana  
The ReEntry Mediation Institute of Louisiana  
Women With A Vision (WWAV)  
Voice of the Experienced (VOTE)  
Ubuntu Village  
William P. Quigley, Professor of Law, Loyola University New Orleans

*Via Email*

**CC:**

Tenisha Stevens, Criminal Justice Commissioner  
Councilmember Helena Moreno, At-Large  
Councilmember Jason Williams, At-Large  
Councilmember Joseph Giarrusso, District A  
Councilmember Jay Banks, District B  
Councilmember Kristin Palmer, District C  
Councilmember Jared Brossett, District D  
Councilmember Cyndi Nguyen, District E

Congressman Cedric Richmond, 2nd Congressional District

State Representative Gary Carter, District 102  
State Representative Mack Marcel Cormier, District 105  
State Representative Royce Duplessis, District 93  
State Representative Aimee Adatto Freeman, District 98  
State Representative Raymond E. Garofalo, District 103  
State Representative Stephanie Hilferty, District 94  
State Representative Jason Hughes, District 100  
State Representative Mandie Landry, District 91  
State Representative Candace N. Newell, District 99  
State Representative Matthew Willard, District 97

State Representative Gary M. Carter, Jr., District 102  
State Representative Raymond E. Garofolo, Jr., District 103  
State Representative Mack Marcel Cormier, District 105  
Senate Member Sharon Hewitt, District 1  
Senate Member Joseph Bouie, District 3  
Senate Member Jimmy Harris, District 4  
Senate Member Karen Carter Peterson, District 5

Senate Member Troy Carter, District 7