



Thursday, March 19, 2020

*Via email*

To: Mayor LaToya Cantrell  
Dr. Jennifer Avegno, MD  
Dr. Alex Billioux, MD, DPhil  
Governor John Bel Edwards

Dear Louisiana Civic and Health Leaders,

The Louisiana Public Health Institute and Vera Institute of Justice recognize the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic in New Orleans, the state of Louisiana, and beyond. As an urgent matter of public health and safety, we formally request the release of people in jail being held pretrial who are low risk, and those who are elderly with health issues that increase their susceptibility to COVID-19; and that all people in jails and prisons receive the proper protections from COVID-19 (i.e., readily-available access to anti-bacterial soap, water, and hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol, etc.).

COVID-19 has proven to spread incredibly quickly in the community, and it is not a matter of if but when it will enter jails. Imagine the speed in which it will spread within a facility where more than 1,000 individuals live in extremely close quarters and cannot practice recommended mitigation strategies. It will not only impact people in the facility but put the employees and their families at risk as well—this is a public health crisis.

Much like our communities are trying to flatten the curve to maintain public health and health care capacity, we should be following similar measures for jails. People in jails are more likely to have health conditions, including mental health and substance abuse disorders, that make them vulnerable to the severe consequences of COVID-19. Jails are not adequately equipped to handle outbreaks and will need to rely on coordination with local health care facilities for treatment options. This will overwhelm our already strained healthcare capacity.

Our request includes the release of:

- Anyone held on \$25,000 bail or less
- All people arrested for a non-violent crime that, under Louisiana statute, would not require a mandatory prison sentence
- All people who are arrested for a non-violent crime for which they would not be mandated to serve a prison sentence if convicted, and who are currently complying with probation for a previous sentence
- All people who are being held pretrial and fall into a high-risk category due to their age and underlying health conditions, making them more susceptible to COVID-19

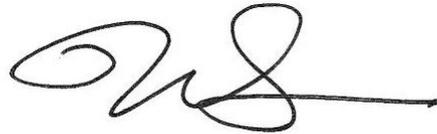
We believe, this additional public health measure will continue to slow the spread of COVID-19 amid this global pandemic and keep our local and state healthcare capacity at a manageable level. Similar efforts are already being implemented in [Los Angeles, California](#) and [Cleveland, Ohio](#).

We understand that moving quickly in this situation is of the utmost importance. We are ready and available to answer any additional questions you may have regarding this request.

Warmest regards,



Shelina Davis, MPH, MSW  
CEO  
Louisiana Public Health Institute



William C. Snowden  
New Orleans Director  
Vera Institute of Justice

Cc: Dr. Joseph Kanter  
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