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Thursday, April 16, 2020

Via email

To: Governor John Bel Edwards
Secretary James LeBlanc
Director Mike Ranatza
Director Loren Lampert
Director Jim Craft
Sheriff Julian C. Whittington

Dear Louisiana Civic and Law Enforcement Leaders,

The Louisiana Public Health Institute is reaching out to applaud your efforts to address the unprecedented health crisis COVID-19 has created, and to urge additional action in order to avoid a catastrophic loss of life among correctional officers and inmates in our parish jails, state prisons, and juvenile facilities.

As you know, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued guidance describing what steps are necessary to stop the spread of COVID-19 in incarcerated settings. While personal protective equipment and adjustments in meals, housing, and programming within facilities can be useful steps, the degree of physical separation necessary to prevent new infections of this virus is nearly impossible in many secure confinement facilities unless populations are substantially reduced below design capacity.

We strongly recommend the expanded use of pretrial release, good time, parole, commutations, re-sentencing, work-release, compassionate-release, medical-release, and home confinement to make expedited and individualized release decisions for people who can be safely housed and temporarily quarantined at home rather than in jail or prison.

Emergency federal funding is available through Bureau of Justice Assistance grants, SAMHSA grants, and potentially FEMA emergency plan funds to support the use of these jail and prison alternatives as temporary and effective ways to battle the spread of COVID-19 in incarcerated settings, and the potential worst case scenarios that may play out because neither staff nor inmates can choose to leave of their own free will.

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