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Via email to [washingtonm6@michigan.gov](mailto:washingtonm6@michigan.gov)

Heidi Washington, Director  
Michigan Department of Corrections  
Grandview Plaza  
206 E. Michigan Ave.  
P.O. Box 30003  
Lansing, MI 48909

Re: COVID-19 Prevention and Management at MDOC

Dear Director Washington:

We are writing to urge you to continue to develop plans for the prevention and management of COVID-19 in the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC). It is crucial that such plans be proactive and evidence-based.

People in prisons are highly vulnerable to outbreaks of contagious illnesses. They are housed in close quarters and are often in poor health. Without the active engagement of the prison administration, they have little ability to inform themselves about preventive measures, or to take such measures if they do manage to learn of them.

We ask that you continue to work closely with the State of Michigan Emergency Operations Center to develop plans to address the virus in the prison system. As the situation develops, such plans may need updating to reflect the most up-to-date information and expert advice. This is an urgent matter. Having appropriate, evidence-based plans in place can help prevent an outbreak and minimize its impact if one does occur. Developing and implementing such plans can save lives.

While the plans should be developed collaboratively by your department and the Michigan Emergency Operations Center together, some of the critical issues that must be addressed are:

- **Education of the people in your custody:** People housed in the prisons need to be informed about the virus and the measures they can take to minimize their risk of contracting or spreading the virus. They must be educated on the importance of proper handwashing, coughing into their elbows, and social distancing to the extent they can. Information about the spread of the virus, the risks associated with it, and prevention and treatment measures must be based on the best available science.
- **Education of the staff:** Correctional, administrative, and medical staff all must be educated about the virus to protect themselves and their families, as well as the people in their custody.

- **Staffing plans:** Regardless of how many staff stay home because they are sick, the prisons will have to continue functioning. There must be a plan for how necessary functions and services will continue if large numbers of staff are out with the virus. The plan should include steps to minimize the danger of MDOC staff introducing the coronavirus into the prison population.
- **Staffing plans for services provided by prisoners:** Many tasks in prisons, such as food preparation and basic sanitation, are performed by prisoners. The plans for an outbreak must also address how necessary tasks performed by prisoners will continue if large numbers of prisoners are ill.
- **Provision of hygiene supplies:** The most basic aspect of infection control is hygiene. There must be ready access to warm water and adequate hygiene supplies, both for handwashing and for cleaning. You have been very responsive when we've contacted you about reports from prisoners that not enough soap is available for handwashing, and we appreciate MDOC's prompt responses. To ensure ongoing access to necessary hygiene supplies we ask that you set up mechanisms for monitoring that the proper number of cleaning supplies are being made available.
- **Screening and testing of the people in your custody:** The plan must include guidance, based on the best science available, on how and when to screen and test people in your facilities for the virus. Screening should include staff as well as prisoners and visitors.
- **Housing of persons exposed to the virus:** The plan must describe how and where people in the prison system will be housed if they are exposed to the virus, are at high risk of serious illness if they become infected, or become sick with it. *This should not result in prolonged, widespread lock-downs.* Any lock-downs or interruptions in regular activities, such as exercise or visits and phone calls with families or attorneys, should be based solely on the best science available and should be as limited as possible in scope and duration. Any decision to suspend visitation must be accompanied by clear plans and procedures to substitute other forms of communication, visitation should not be suspended indefinitely, and legal visits must continue unimpeded. If visits are curtailed, telephone and video visitation fees should be suspended. Additionally, prisoners and their families, as well as advocacy organizations and legal representatives, should be kept informed regarding any such restrictions and why they are being imposed.
- **Treatment:** Courses of treatment must be evidence-based, available immediately, and in compliance with scientifically-based public health protocols.
- **Vulnerable Populations:** The plan must provide for additional precautions for those who are at high risk of serious illness if they are infected, such as pregnant women and people with underlying conditions, including heart disease, pulmonary disease or diabetes, compromised immune systems, or disabilities, and people whose housing placements restrict their access to medical care and limit the staff's ability to observe them. We urge MDOC to consider alternatives to incarceration for populations who could be at increased risk in the event of an outbreak, including working with the parole board and governor to expedite medical parole and clemency where appropriate.
- **Data collection:** The collection of data regarding COVID-19 will be part of the public health response. As with any contagious disease, data collection is critical to understanding and fighting the virus. The prison system must be part of this process. The same information that is tracked in the community must be tracked in prisons.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact us if we can be of assistance in your response to the current crisis.

Sincerely,

Elaine Lewis, Legal Fellow  
Dan Korobkin, Legal Director  
American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan

Natalie Holbrook, Program Director  
American Friends Service Committee  
Michigan Criminal Justice Program

John Cooper, Executive Director  
Safe & Just Michigan