



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jessica Ramos

Ramos COVID-19 Letter to NY Correctional Facilities: Release of Vulnerable Populations, Send More Supplies

JESSICA RAMOS April 8, 2020

| ISSUE: **END MASS INCARCERATION, COVID-19**



STATE SENATOR
Jessica Ramos

Anthony J. Annucci

Acting Commissioner

Department of Corrections and Community Supervision

Howard A. Zucker M.D., J.D.

Commissioner

Department of Health

Dear Acting Commissioner Annucci, and Commissioner Zucker,

Thank you for your guidance and leadership during these unsure times. I write to express my grave concern for the wellbeing of the incarcerated community and those who work in state prisons amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The density in our correctional system does not allow for social distancing and reports indicate that life saving supplies like gloves, masks, hand sanitizer and soap are of limited supply and not readily accessible to officers or the incarcerated.

In these conditions, I strongly support the expeditious release of particularly vulnerable populations in state prisons, including older people and those who are immunocompromised or have underlying health conditions. Additionally, we should be releasing people who pose little safety risk, including the over 4,000 incarcerated for technical non-criminal parole violations. I commend Governor Cuomo for committing to release 1,100 people accused of technical parole violations and urge the Governor with the Board of Parole to continue working together to release the other thousands held on such violations. Meanwhile, we need to ensure staff and incarcerated people who remain are adequately educated and equipped to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Multiple state facilities have confirmed cases, and if the alarming growth rate in NYC jails is any indication of what is to come, we need to move rapidly to slow the spread of the virus in prisons. Over 10,000 people in state prisons are age 50 or older with many having underlying health issues such as asthma or heart disease, and are recognized as being particularly

susceptible to illness. If urgent steps are not taken, medical facilities which are already overwhelmed will be unable to provide adequate care for those who contract coronavirus and maintain care for those with chronic illnesses. People aged 50 and older have the lowest rate of recidivism, and many could be released at this time to reduce their risk of contamination for people in prisons.

Laudable, drastic steps have been taken to flatten the curve in our communities, but little has been done in correctional facilities. I urge you to take immediate action to release vulnerable people and those who pose little safety risk. Please ensure incarcerated people and correctional staff are adequately equipped with necessary supplies to slow the rate of infection and treat those who become ill; that all state correctional institutions accept any assistance from the federal or local governments mandated in my bill, S3393-B. Finally, provide everyone in our state prisons comprehensive information about how to keep themselves and others as safe as possible from the virus.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to working with you to reduce the risk of COVID-19 to those in correctional facilities.

Sincerely,

Senator Jessica Ramos-13th Senatorial District

cc: The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo

Governor of New York

Michael B. Powers

President, New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association

Bryan Hlusk

Central Region Vice-President, New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association