

Jersey City Together
an affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation
P.O. Box 136, Jersey City, NJ 07303

March 24, 2020

Dear Commissioner Persichilli & Governor Murphy:

Thank you for your leadership during this ongoing public health crisis.

We are thankful for your decision to prioritize the release of low-level offenders from county jails across New Jersey in order to promote public health. However, we want to improve the process after repeated conversations over the last 24 hours with community members, the families of those who are incarcerated, individuals who work in the jail or prison, and direct service agencies serving those individuals.

In particular, these conversations make clear that the following actions must take place immediately. This is particularly important if more people are likely to be released in the coming weeks.

- For jails and prisons where COVID-19 is present, **individuals who are released must be tested for COVID-19 prior to their release.** (Currently, we believe this is only true for the Hudson, Essex, and Morris County Jails.) Best practices across the world have shown that mass testing (prior to the onset of symptoms) is critical to stopping the spread of the virus.

These individuals will likely be returning to vulnerable communities themselves; thus, determining if someone is infected is absolutely critical at this moment. If they are infected, they should also have a place to stay and the resources they need to self-quarantine.

- For those who have already been released from the Hudson County Jail this morning, every effort should be made to prioritize these individuals' immediate testing for the reasons described above. For those who have not yet been released from the county jails where COVID-19 is present, these individuals should be tested prior to being released and a procedure should be in place for health care services.
- To contain current infections in the Hudson, Essex, & Morris Co. Jails, testing should be prioritized for people (staff, inmates) who have come into contact with infected individuals.
- If there are future releases of individuals, there must be better procedures put in place to ensure individuals are tested before release, are given the resources they need for housing, food, etc., and are able to recognize symptoms and can self-quarantine during this pandemic.

Given the time-sensitive nature of this letter and its requests, we look forward to your immediate response. Jersey City Together is a non-partisan coalition of more than 30 religious congregations and non-profits representing tens of thousands of individuals in Jersey City and Hudson County. We can be reached at jerseycity@njtogether.org.

Yours sincerely,

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Rev. David Carment
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