

FREE THEM NOW

COVID-19 in Connecticut Prisons and Jails: #FreeThemNowCT

As Connecticut continues to confront COVID-19, Governor Ned Lamont and state officials have failed to develop a comprehensive plan to protect incarcerated people in jails and prisons across the state. As a result, COVID-19 continues to spread in correctional facilities in Connecticut—and deaths of incarcerated people continues to rise.

Jails and prisons are notorious incubators of contagions due to close quarters and unsanitary conditions. This puts incarcerated people and Department of Correction (DOC) staff at heightened risk for COVID-19—and jeopardizes community members outside of jails and prisons as well. Across the U.S., prisons and jails remain among the top cluster sites in the country. As of February 24, 2022, 575,916 incarcerated tested positive for COVID-19, and at least 7,000 individuals and staff have died from the virus.ⁱ This is one reason public health experts have called for decarceration to protect incarcerated people and communities outside of jail and prisons from COVID-19.ⁱⁱ

In Connecticut's jails and prisons:

- Only 53% of people detained in Connecticut's prisons and jails have received at least one shot of the COVID-19 vaccine. The CT Department of Corrections has the lowest vaccination rate of any state agency, with only 56% of correctional officers vaccinated.ⁱⁱⁱ
- At February 18, 2022, 8,265 incarcerated people have tested positive for COVID-19.^{iv} The total percentage of incarcerated people who have tested positive is 88% compared to the overall state average of 20%, showing the heightened risk incarcerated people face. As of February 24, 2022, 568 incarcerated people currently have COVID-19.^v
- Governor Lamont has failed to take comprehensive action to protect the lives of people incarcerated in jails and prisons. As of March 11, 2022, 29 people in the custody of the Connecticut Department of Corrections have died from COVID related complications.^{vi}
- According to The Marshall Project, Connecticut is the 20th worst state in the country in terms of COVID-19 cases per capita of incarcerated individuals.^{vii}
- Funding for medical care for incarcerated people in the DOC's budget has declined steadily since 2008.^{viii} Since 2008, the DOC has been sued several times for medical negligence, which only highlights how unprepared the Department is to handle the virus. In 2019, Tianna Laboy, who was detained in York Correction Institution, was forced to give birth in the toilet of her prison cell because the facility did not have a full-time OB/GYN on-site.^{ix}

To save lives and keep people safe, Connecticut needs a comprehensive pandemic plan for people incarcerated in jails and prisons. Such a plan must:

- Immediately implement an aggressive plan for emergency release of people from jails and prisons in Connecticut, prioritizing people with compromised immune systems.
- Regularly test, monitor and report COVID-19 rates for every incarcerated individual and DOC staff member in each facility, accounting for delayed symptomology and asymptomatic carriers.^x
- Provide continuous access to the COVID-19 vaccine and booster shots for all eligible incarcerated individuals with an immediate focus on elderly people over the age of 55, medically fragile people and/or people with compromised immune systems.
- Provide PPE, soap, and hand sanitizer for people detained in CT jails and prisons to assist reducing the spread of COVID-19.
- Eliminate the practice of putting incarcerated individuals who test positive for COVID-19 in solitary confinement or inhumane isolation.
- Ease the housing restrictions for incarcerated people upon their release, ensuring that they can identify safe and stable housing. In addition, the state should coordinate non-congregate housing arrangements using existing space throughout the state.
- Require the DOC to make their plans for prevention and management of COVID-19 in each correctional facility publicly available with oversight by an independent body of health experts.

Governor Lamont could enact such a plan immediately, but has failed to do so. In the absence of his leadership, the State Legislature should pass legislation to require the Governor to develop and implement such a plan.

IT IS TIME TO FREE THEM NOW.

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i The Covid Prison Project. (n.d.). National COVID-19 Statistics. Retrieved February 24, 2022, from <https://covidprisonproject.com/data/national-overview/>

ii Brie Williams and Leann Bertsch, *A Public Health Doctor and Head of Correction Agree: We Must Immediately Release People From Jails and Prisons*: The Appeal (Mar. 2020), available at: <https://theappeal.org/a-public-health-doctor-and-head-of-corrections-agree-we-must-immediately-release-people-from-jails-and-prisons/> and Giovanni S.P. Malloy, Lisa Puglisi, Margaret L. Brandeau, Tyler D Harvey, and Emily A. Wang, *The effectiveness of interventions to reduce COVID-19 transmission in a large urban jail*: medRxiv (June 2020), available at: <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.06.16.20133280v1>

iii Connecticut State Department of Correction. (n.d.). Health information and advisories. Retrieved February 24, 2022, from <https://portal.ct.gov/DOC/Common-Elements/Common-Elements/Health-Information-and-Advisories>

iv Id.

v The New York Times. (n.d.). Tracking coronavirus in Connecticut: Latest map and case count. Retrieved February 24, 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/connecticut-covid-cases.html>

vi Id.

vii The Marshall Project, *A State-by-State Look at Coronavirus in Prisons*, available at: <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2020/05/01/a-state-by-state-look-at-coronavirus-in-prisons>

viii Lisa Backus, *Federal Settlement Reached On Reducing Prison Population To Prevent COVID Spread*: CT New Junkie (June 2020), available at: https://www.ctnewsjunkie.com/archives/entry/20200607_federal_settlement_reached_on_reducing_prison_population_to/?utm_source=CTNewsJunkie+Main+List+With+Publication+Groups&utm_campaign=99ad5ec709-MCP_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a493d2308d-99ad5ec709-95954025

ix Jenna Carlesso, *Inmate who delivered baby in prison cell sues state for denying medical care*: CT Mirror (Mar. 2019), available at: <https://ctmirror.org/2019/03/04/inmate-who-delivered-baby-in-prison-cell-sues-state-for-denying-medical-care/>

x Yale Medical, Public Health and Nursing Faculty, *Letter on COVID in CT Prisons/Jails*: (April 2020), available at: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1frm8ULLwt1Bwv-oLnEasM8UyQNqmxP6qX7Vu1XYoMAE/edit>