

January 15, 2021

Lieutenant Governor Barnes
Wisconsin State Capitol
Via email to: ltgov@wisconsin.gov

Dear Lieutenant Governor Barnes,

As you are aware, around the country, COVID-19 has spread at unparalleled rates inside jails, prisons, and detention centers. In Wisconsin's prisons, 10,602 people have tested positive for COVID-19 as of the date of this letter, and 25 people have died from the virus.

Despite the movement towards a vaccine, the risk to Wisconsin's incarcerated population from COVID-19 is not over. In fact, it is only increasing. The Governor and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections must take much stronger steps than their actions so far in order to save lives both inside and outside of prison walls.

We continue to be concerned that vulnerable people in state prisons are not being protected, as these congregate facilities remain ill-suited for social distancing. Moreover, we have heard from many incarcerated people who fear for their lives, and their families on the outside, who are concerned that they may never see their loved ones again.

The ACLU of Wisconsin and our coalition partners continue to call on Governor Evers and Secretary Carr to immediately use the powers available to them under Wisconsin state law to transfer medically at-risk persons outside of prison walls. Sufficient personal protective equipment and sanitizing supplies must be made available to everyone within the prisons. Wearing masks, temperature checks, and symptom monitoring should be mandatory for all prison staff, as well as providing staff with sufficient paid sick leave so no one feels the economic need to report for duty while sick or after being exposed to an infected person.

The Governor can immediately reduce Wisconsin's prison population at the DOC to ease overcrowding and effectively implement physical distancing and other safety standards during the COVID-19 crisis, and plan for a possible influx of new admissions once court cases resume.

By using his clemency powers to release people in prison who are at higher risk of adverse COVID-19 outcomes due to age or health conditions, and who are already within six months of their mandatory release, the Governor could save lives.

As a former organizer for MICAH that worked on these very issues early on in your career, we hope you will meet with representatives of some of the below-mentioned organizations to discuss this proposal and how you have advised the Governor to date. Please call

[Sean Wilson](mailto:Sean.Wilson@micah.org) at 414-439-6528 to arrange a time to speak.

Thank you,

Christopher Ott, ACLU of Wisconsin

African American Roundtable

All of Us or None Wisconsin

Black Lives Matter to Wisconsin Unitarian Universalists

BLOC (Black Leaders Organizing Community)

Breaking Barriers Mentoring Inc

Karen Coy Romano, Co-chair Criminal Justice Taskforce

EXPO (Ex-Incarcerated People Organizing)

Kids Forward

NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) Wisconsin

National Association of Social Workers, Wisconsin Chapter

National Lawyers Guild, Milwaukee Chapter,

Pastors United

Rid Racism Milwaukee

Revolution Ready

Shannon Ross, The Community

Sharlen Moore, Youth Justice Milwaukee

The Milwaukee Turners

Wisconsin Justice Initiative