



THE
AMERICAN
CONSERVATIVE
UNION
FOUNDATION



FAITH & FREEDOM COALITION



March 16, 2018

Ms. Julie Jones
Secretary
Florida Department of Corrections
501 South Calhoun Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-2500

Dear Secretary Jones:

We write to ask the Florida Department of Corrections (FDC) to reconsider its plan to reduce inmate visitation, as announced in Deputy Secretary Dixon's memo dated February 16, 2018.

We understand why FDC believes a temporary change to visitation policies is necessary. Unfortunately, FDC finds itself in this position, in part, because of the failure by lawmakers to reduce Florida's state prison population. This has left FDC dangerously understaffed relative to the stubbornly high number of inmates who remain in your care. The safety and security of your inmates and correctional officers is of unparalleled importance, and extraordinary steps may be justified to ensure neither is placed in jeopardy.

On behalf of thousands of families statewide, however, we urge you to reconsider restricting visitation and consider alternative solutions to the contraband problem. If no such alternative is immediately available, we ask you to restore full visitation at the earliest possible time.

As you know, inmate visitation promotes stability and family cohesion. Maintaining significant and stable visitation opportunities helps inmates maintain the relationships necessary to return successfully to society upon release, which is FDC's objective for those who will return to Florida communities.

Equally important, visitation is the only means by which inmates can maintain direct ties to family and friends. In particular, denying children the opportunity to see their mothers and fathers, and denying parents the privilege of spending time with sons and daughters – even for two weeks at a time – imposes a punishment on those who have done nothing to deserve it. Even modest restrictions on visitation could have negative unintended consequences, such as disrupted routines that lead to less overall visitation over time.

We have heard from dozens of families and inmates who are despondent at the prospect of having visitation cut in half, especially because of a problem they have not caused nor to which they have contributed. For instance, just this week we heard from a 70-year-old widow who lives two hours away from her incarcerated son and visits him every weekend. She says she tries to

“keep our relationship as close as possible” because her son “is all I have, and I’m all he has.” Her son helps her with bills and other things she has trouble handling herself, and she worries what reduced visitation will mean.

We recognize that managing Florida’s largest state agency is an enormously difficult job, and we applaud you and your officers for your work. While we do not believe the decision to restrict visitation was made with the intent to punish inmates or their families, it *will* punish them nevertheless.

Accordingly, we ask that you seek less restrictive options to keep FDC staff and inmates safe. If that is not possible, we request that full visitation be restored as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

David Safavian, Deputy Director
Center for Criminal Justice Reform
American Conservative Union Foundation

Patrick Purtill
Director of Legislative Affairs
Faith & Freedom Coalition

Kevin Ring, President
Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM)