



March 30, 2020

Governor Tate Reeves
P.O. Box 139
Jackson, MS 39205

Interim Director Tommy Taylor
Mississippi Department of Corrections
301 N. Lamar St.
Jackson, MS 39201

Dear Governor Reeves and Director Taylor:

We urge you to take immediate action to protect the lives and health of people living and working in Mississippi's prisons and jails, as well as those living in communities near those facilities. We also ask that you provide more information to the families of those with loved ones incarcerated in Mississippi, so that they can be assured that the state is doing everything in its power to protect their health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Governor Reeves is authorized by Article 5, Sec. 124 of the Mississippi Constitution to grant pardons and reprieves in all criminal and penal cases, except for treason and impeachment. We urge you to use the authority to grant reprieves as quickly as possible to incarcerated people who are the most vulnerable to acquiring COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization have identified the vulnerable population as older people, as well as people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease).

As you know, many of the precautions that those outside of prison have been encouraged to take cannot be heeded inside prison. There is no way to practice social distancing; the hygiene is poor; and the medical care is inadequate. Once the virus spreads inside the prisons, elderly and sick people will be sitting ducks. Corrections officers, too, will become sick. As medical experts have warned, local communities will be threatened if COVID-19 spreads throughout state prisons and jails.

In addition to the governor's constitutional authority to grant clemency, Mississippi law provides a couple options to allow early release for sick and elderly people. Conditional medical release is available for those with serious medical conditions, and geriatric parole is permitted for prisoners who are age 60 or older who meet specific eligibility criteria. We urge you to consider utilizing these options, as well, in order to protect everyone who lives and works in the state's prisons and surrounding communities.

Families of people who are incarcerated or work as corrections professionals are understandably worried about the spread of COVID-19. While you work to find ways to reduce the danger these people face, we strongly encourage you to create greater transparency about the impact of the disease and your efforts to combat it. Many state departments of correction have created dashboards to make the public aware of basic information about what is happening in state prisons in real time. This information would provide comfort to worried families, minimize calls and inquiries for more information and data, reduce rumors, and quiet fears.

At a minimum, the dashboard would be updated daily and include, by facility, and for both prisoners and corrections staff:

- Total number of tests, including total numbers of positives and negatives
- New cases
- Hospitalizations, including transfers to community medical facilities
- Quarantines/lockdowns
- Deaths
- Number of recoveries

We hope you will agree that Mississippi's families deserve consistently updated information about the health and well-being of their loved ones. Moreover, all state policymakers need real-time data to create appropriate policy responses.

The clock is ticking. Urgent action is needed to save lives and protect the health and safety of tens of thousands of Mississippians who live and work in and around the state's prisons. We urge you to act immediately.

Sincerely,

Ashley Lukens
President
Mississippi Dreams Prisoner Advocacy

Molly Gill
Vice President of Policy
FAMM