



April 15, 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:

Just over two weeks ago, we wrote to 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 surrounding communities. We also asked that you begin to 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. Having heard nothing from you, while watching other states take steps to advance both of these objectives, we write again.

Since we wrote on March 30, one person incarcerated in Mississippi's prisons has died of COVID-19 and a handful of corrections officials have tested positive for the disease. We expect these numbers to rise as they have elsewhere. We therefore reiterate our call for Governor Reeves to use his constitutional authority to grant reprieves as quickly as possible to incarcerated people who are the most vulnerable to acquiring COVID-19. We also repeat our request for state leaders to use the existing conditional medical release and geriatric parole authorities to move sick and elderly people out of harm's way. Bold executive action in one of these ways could protect prisoners and corrections officers alike.

In our letter, we also asked you to create a dashboard on the Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) website in order to make the public aware of basic information about what is happening in state prisons in real time. As we noted, this information would provide comfort to worried families, minimize calls and inquiries for more information and data, reduce rumors, and quiet fears. We acknowledge that MDOC has a questions-and-answers factsheet on its page, but even that information is dated. For example, the factsheet states that there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the state's prison system. This is obviously not true.

Over the past two weeks, more state corrections departments have created dashboards, including North Carolina and Arizona. While it's too late for Mississippi to be a leader in transparency, there is no reason for the state to finish last. So, again, we urge you to create a dashboard that can 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 families with loved ones behind bars deserve timely information about the health and well-being of their loved ones. On behalf of those families, we urge you to take action now 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.

Sincerely,

Ashley Lukens
President
Mississippi Dreams Prisoner Advocacy

Molly Gill
Vice President of Policy
FAMM