March 31, 2020

Commissioner of Prisons Todd Ishee
North Carolina Department of Public Safety
512 North Salisbury Street
Raleigh, NC 27604

Dear Commissioner Ishee:

In the wake of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we are grateful for your efforts to reduce the risk the coronavirus poses to people housed in the North Carolina Department of Public Safety (DPS), and to the corrections professionals who care for them. We are writing to request that you continue these efforts by making available more information that will be useful to the families of both prisoners and staff as this crisis unfolds.

As you may already know, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services has developed a public webpage[1] to monitor and track relevant statewide and county data on COVID-19 – including total number of cases, tests, deaths, and hospitalizations. This is a valuable tool both for North Carolinians to stay informed on the spread of the virus, and for state and local officials to adjust policies in response to changing information.

More than 35,000 prisoners are housed in DPS adult correctional facilities, and thousands more DPS employees have daily contact with facilities. All could be directly affected by COVID-19 inside North Carolina's prisons. A DPS dashboard similar to the Department of Health and Human Service's would be useful to keep families of incarcerated loved ones, as well as families of corrections professionals, apprised of what is happening inside 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. The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, led by Correctional Leaders Association president John Wetzel, recently created a similar dashboard[2], and a handful of other state correctional agencies are also using dashboards to communicate COVID-19 data.

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

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[1] https://www.ncdhhs.gov/covid-19-case-count-nc#nc-counties-with-cases
[2] https://www.cor.pa.gov/Pages/COVID-19-Dashboard.aspx

Families for Justice Reform

- Deaths
- Number of recoveries

On behalf of thousands of families around North Carolina, we are grateful for the steps you have already taken to protect their loved ones in your care. Now, on their behalf, we are asking you to create a dashboard to track and publish relevant data related to the impact of COVID-19 inside the DPS. Families deserve consistently updated information about the health and well-being of their loved ones, and lawmakers need real-time data to create appropriate policy responses.

Sincerely,

Molly Gill
Vice President of Policy, FAMM