

Dear Governor Lamont,

As a person of faith, and a member of the First Presbyterian Church New Haven community, I am writing to call on you to act immediately to protect the lives of the people impacted by prisons and jails in Connecticut. The spread of COVID-19 is a national emergency that threatens thousands of lives across our country.

While everyone is at risk, we in positions of influence have a moral obligation to ensure that our most vulnerable—the elderly, the sick, those without medical care, and those unable to protect themselves from the virus—get the help they need. We have a further obligation to our community to keep the people whose job it is to work in jails and prisons, and their communities, safe.

The below decarceral guidelines are designed to prevent three things: social spreading, jail “churn,” and the deaths of vulnerable people.

### **Social Spreading**

In order to prevent the rapid growth of COVID-19 from overburdening our health-care system and claiming lives, both those in secure facilities and the people who work in them, it is the responsibility of decision makers at every level to prevent and contain the spread of the virus by taking action to promote the most effective strategy in abating the pandemic: social distancing in order to slow “community spread.”

### **The Particular Issue of Jail and Prison “Churn”**

Jails and Prisons combine the worst aspects of a cruise ship and a large public gathering and, thus, can be the perfect breeding ground for the spread of COVID-19. People are constantly booked into and out of jail and prison facilities and each night guards, vendors, and other jail staff are going home while others are coming in, which results in a [massive turnover](#). For example, more than half of the people in jail are only in there for two to three days.

Further, enclosed structures like jails can cause COVID-19 to spread like wildfire and introducing just one person with it can lead to it impacting not just everyone inside the jail or prison but anyone leaving the facility—whether a person who is released or staff returning back to their homes— who then interacts with their communities.

### **Preventive Measures Cannot Be Taken in Jails and Prisons**

Experts recommend that to protect the people most vulnerable from death or serious illness from COVID-19 that they be appropriately separated through social distancing. Yet

separating sick people from well people to prevent the disease from spreading can be nearly impossible in prison due to logistical [considerations](#).

**WE ARE WRITING TO URGE YOU TO ENACT THE FOLLOWING DECARCERAL GUIDELINES:**

- Reduce the prison population by prioritizing the immediate release of the [elderly and medically vulnerable](#).
- Reduce the prison population by agreeing to the early release of anyone within 18 months of their release date.
- Reduce the prison population by urging a hold to all new state prison sentences if delaying the sentence would not pose an unreasonable risk of safety to a specific person or persons.
- Reduce the prison and jail populations by releasing all people held on probation and probation technical violation detainers or sentences.
- Make transparent a policy, vetted by public health officials, for handling COVID-19 within each facility.

As a Connecticut resident, I know how seriously you take your duty to protect the lives of people living and working in our prisons and jails and the surrounding communities. The health, well-being and indeed the lives of these people are in your hands. We urge you to take immediate and decisive action now to save lives. We will support you in taking the bold, but necessary, action now to protect the health of people in our community, including the most vulnerable.

Sincerely,

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Resident of [Town]

Member of First Presbyterian Church New Haven