



## PRISONERS' LEGAL SERVICES OF MASSACHUSETTS

**For immediate release**  
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Contact: Carisa Cunningham, 617-447-6500  
cc@carisacunningham.com

### **First COVID-19 Case in Mass Prison, but still no Plan from DOC** *Advocates Sound the Alarm and call for Reducing Prison Population*

The first prison case of COVID-19 was reported at the Massachusetts Treatment Center today, a prison in Bridgewater, MA, and advocates are sounding the alarm about the prison system's lack of preparedness.

"People who are incarcerated are at extremely high risk," said Elizabeth Matos, Executive Director of Prisoners' Legal Services. "Many, particularly the sick and elderly, cannot take even the most elemental steps to protect themselves – like physical distancing, or frequently washing their hands."

"We are behind the eight ball on prevention and need to act aggressively to prevent the number of infections from reaching tragic numbers. The Department Correction and Sheriffs, working with proper health authorities, must quickly and transparently create, release, and execute a comprehensive plan for COVID-19 in the state's prisons and jails, and it must include releases."

On March 12, [Matos wrote to Governor Charlie Baker](#), Public Safety Secretary Thomas Turco, DOC Commissioner Carol Mici, and Middlesex Sheriff Koutoujian, the head of the Massachusetts Sheriff's Association, asking for the release and immediate implementation of a plan. There has been no response to date.

The plan should include:

- **Reducing incarceration** through compassionate release and other measure
- **Education** of people in custody about the virus, as well as staff and volunteers;
- **Staffing** plans, including the staff work that is done by prisoners;
- **Prevention:** provision of hygiene supplies to prisoners, screening and testing, and housing of those infected by the virus;
- **Guidelines for lockdown** conditions, should lockdowns become necessary;
- **A treatment plan** that is evidence-based and the elimination of co-pays;

- **Focus on vulnerable populations:** those with compromised immune systems, chronic illnesses, and disabilities; as well as prisoners who are pregnant or elderly.
- **Data collection** of the virus' course in prisons and jails.

The release of prisoners from facilities in New York, Ohio, the Carolinas, Pennsylvania, Oregon, California, and in countries like Spain, Iran and the UK demonstrate a recognition that reducing the numbers of people in jails and prisons will minimize the spread of COVID-19 and the deaths of those most vulnerable, in addition to correctional and medical staff and their respective families.

**NOTE: Families of people incarcerated in Massachusetts, as well as PLS ED Elizabeth Matos are available for interview.**

*Prisoners' Legal Services promotes the safe, humane, and lawful treatment of Massachusetts prisoners through civil rights litigation, administrative advocacy, client counseling, and outreach to policy makers and the public.*

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