



April 8, 2020

Mayor Muriel Bowser
Mayor of Washington, DC
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Mr. Charles Allen
Councilmember, DC City Council
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Ms. Eleanor Holmes Norton
U.S. Congresswoman
U.S. House of Representatives
2136 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Re: District protective actions to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Dear Mayor Bowser, Councilmember Allen & Congresswoman Holmes Norton,

Individuals and community organizations who participate in the ReThink Justice DC Coalition have joined our voices with advocates such as The Washington Lawyers' Committee, the ACLU DC and the Justice Roundtable, to call for immediate action to minimize the risk that the COVID-19 coronavirus presents to the lives of citizens who are arrested, and detained, in the DC Department of Corrections. Below are steps that we urge the District government take without delay to protect citizens who are most vulnerable to this highly contagious virus. We ask that:

1. The Metropolitan Police Department save lives and help flatten the curve by ensuring its officers do not place anyone in the jail unless, after all alternatives are considered, the person cannot safely remain in the community. We applaud MPD's recently announced expanded criteria that district stations will use to determine which arrestees will be released on citation, pending a future court date. While this is a step in the right direction, we also suggest that citations be written on the street to eliminate precinct trips entirely when these criteria are met.
2. We applaud the Department of Corrections for recent reductions in its population between March 28 and April 3 totaling 87 individuals. We encourage the District to

fully implement the emergency legislation passed on 3/24/2020 and release all people serving misdemeanor sentences. The District government should request that judges in Superior Court, the staff of the Public Defenders' Service and assigned counsel identify clients they believe could most readily be released.

3. The Department of Corrections protect its staff, as well as CDF and CTF residents, by providing them with sufficient PPE, sanitizing and cleaning supplies and hand-washing breaks to ensure compliance with CDC guidelines in order to minimize Coronavirus contagion within DOC facilities. We were pleased to note that the Mayor's Coronavirus Situational Report included the Department of Corrections on the Mayor's list to receive PPE supplies covering expected needs through August 2020.
4. The District identify facilities, now sitting idle (college dorms, hotels, with their associated maintenance staffs), and contract with them to provide temporary quarantine and transitional housing as incarcerated individuals are released from DOC, BOP, and federal halfway houses.
5. The matter of returning the Parole Board from federal to District control presents an immediate need. A comprehensive report compiled by several ReThink Justice Coalition DC participants was published on March 8, 2020.¹ Our urgent request is that you immediately mobilize an empowered team with the intent of returning the Parole Board function to the District of Columbia within the 2021 Fiscal Year.
6. District leaders proactively communicate: a) the District's interest in the USPC's adoption of their new guidelines favoring release individuals whenever possible and cease incarcerating based on technical violations; b) their intent that BOP implement new good time/compassionate release emergency legislation passed on April 7, 2020; and c) strongly advocate for BOP halfway houses to release DC citizens to home confinement.

We are asking you to take action to protect District residents whose lives are clearly endangered due to the Coronavirus pandemic and the imminent spread into the most vulnerable and marginalized District communities. The DC government has the primary responsibility of safeguarding those under its control and in its custody. We therefore call upon the District government to fulfill its duty to those who are arrested and incarcerated in the Department of Corrections in order to ensure maximum public health safety for all District residents.

Respectfully yours,

Participants of the ReThink Justice DC Coalition

CC: District of Columbia Councilmembers

¹ <http://rethinkjusticedc.org/returning-the-parole-function-to-local-control-a-report-from-the-rethink-justice-new-visions-committee>