



April 6, 2020

TO:

J. Clark Kelso, Federal Medical Receiver, ckelso@pacific.edu

Ralph Diaz, Secretary of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, ralph.diaz@cdcr.ca.gov

Diana Toche, Undersecretary, Health Care Services, CDCR, diana.toche@cdcr.ca.gov

Amy Miller, Director of the Division of Correctional Policy Research and Internal Oversight, CDCR, amy.miller@cdcr.ca.gov

RE: URGENT ACTION for COVID-19 Safety and Care at CCWF & CIW

We are writing to you with great concern about the health and safety of incarcerated people in the Central California Women's Facility (CCWF) and the California Institution for Women (CIW) during the current public health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 23, CCWP sent a letter to Warden Richard Montes at CIW and Warden Michael Palleres at CCWF. We have yet to receive a response and, to our understanding, no significant changes have been made to provide life-saving supplies and information, or to accelerate releases for those at highest risk of deadly infection in order to reduce population density and prevent deaths. In the absence of response, staff have tested positive for COVID-19 at both CCWF and CIW.

California Coalition for Women Prisoners (CCWP) has been advocating with and for people incarcerated at CCWF and CIW for twenty-five years, particularly regarding the provision of healthcare. The Young Women's Freedom Center (YWFC) builds the leadership of directly impacted cis & trans women, girls, and gender non-conforming people to transform the systems and policies that keep them stuck in cycles of poverty, incarceration, and violence. Comprised of over 500 directly impacted people, the Sister Warriors Freedom Coalition (SWFC) is building a powerful movement of women, girls, trans and non-binary people of color along with our families, loved ones and communities who have been harmed by the criminal justice system.

We understand that even with the best of intentions, ensuring the health and safety of large numbers of people in a confined space is difficult. However, we are receiving very distressing information from people at both CIW and CCWF regarding current conditions that make us extremely concerned about their safety and health.

Incarcerated people are at heightened risk and an outbreak of COVID-19 inside endangers everyone: incarcerated people, staff, and the public. We understand that neither CCWF nor CIW have adequate equipment to keep incarcerated people breathing should they need it. It is of utmost importance that CDCR does everything in its power to prevent this outbreak.

We are requesting the following to protect the health & safety of people at CIW & CCWF:

1. Release all elderly (50+) and medically high-risk people.

The only way to prevent a massive number of deaths in CA prisons is to release substantial numbers of people. Conditions at CA prisons prevent social distancing. CCWF, for example, is at 140% of capacity and neither CCWF or CIW are equipped to respond to an outbreak of COVID-19. It is not only the numbers but the degree of overcrowding in dormitory-based cells that disproportionately impacts people in women's prisons in California. On Thursday, April 2nd, attorneys representing people in California's prisons were heard in federal court asking for an emergency order to reduce the state's prison population to help provide enough space in prison dormitories for a 6-foot social distancing buffer. There are at least 17,000 people in CA prisons deemed "high-risk medical" and at least 6,500 elderly. These populations are the most vulnerable to COVID-19. Reducing the prison population will slow the spread of the virus and releasing those most at risk of developing serious symptoms will prevent local hospitals from being overwhelmed with patients.

Community-based organizations are available with resources to assist with transportation and reentry for people released from CIW and CCWF.

2. Immediately and freely distribute non-diluted cleaning and disinfecting supplies.

Incarcerated people do not have access to the Center for Disease Control's recommended cleaning and disinfecting supplies. Many have reported being unable to access soap to wash their hands. When they do have access, these supplies are diluted beyond efficiency and must be "checked out" from prison staff. Non-diluted cleaning and disinfecting supplies must be made freely available throughout the day. Outside community members must also be allowed to mail-in necessary cleaning and disinfecting supplies through vendors approved by CDCR.

3. Permit incarcerated people to wear cloth or other masks at all times & mandate the use of personal protective equipment for incarcerated & non-incarcerated medical workers.

As of April 2, the Center for Disease Control issued a statement "advising the use of simple cloth face coverings to slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others." As people in prisons are in constant proximity and

living in close quarters, they must be allowed to use masks as basic prevention from coronavirus infection.

Incarcerated people who work as janitorial or medical support in the medical buildings do not have adequate personal protective equipment (PPE), including disposable gloves, masks and gowns and are then returning to their housing units, potentially carrying coronavirus with them. All medical and cleaning workers, staff and incarcerated people alike, must be provided proper PPE in order to safely perform their work responsibilities.

4. Immediately end staff movement between prisons such as between CIW & CIM and between CCWF & VSP.

We are deeply concerned that staff are going back and forth between CIW and CIM, and between CCWF and VSP. As of April 5, there are 16 confirmed staff cases at CIM and kitchen cooks and hospital facility maintenance staff are still being allowed to work at both CIW and CIM. Staff continue to work at both VSP and CCWF as well, despite confirmed COVID-19 cases at both prisons. We demand an immediate end to staff movement between institutions.

5. CDCR must ensure that incarcerated people & the public have rapid access to information as pandemic conditions continue to change.

As every public health worker knows, clear communication is the key to the safety, mental health and well-being of any community during a health crisis. CDCR has been slow in communicating to those incarcerated, and messaging has often been contradicted by actions taken or by a lack of action. It is imperative that prison officials transparently communicate and coordinate response plans with the general public to ensure the safety of everyone inside and outside of the prison system.

6. Ensure continued access to medication & all healthcare services, telephone, JPay and mail. During a lockdown, extend wifi access and provide personal tablets and cellphones to all people.

Incarcerated individuals must continue to receive access to healthcare services (medical, dental, and mental health) and daily medication as well as access to the outside world through phone, email and mail. It is essential that incarcerated people are able to maintain contact with their loved ones and reach out for support. This is/will be especially true if CDCR implements more restrictive lockdown conditions. If incarcerated people are unable to access kiosks and regular telephones, CDCR must be responsible for distributing personal tablets and cellphones so contact can be maintained. This includes extending wifi access to reach all cells.

We need swift action to prevent this public health nightmare from escalating further — a matter of life and death for thousands of people.

Sincerely,



Hafsa Al-Amin, Policy Coordinator, hafsah@womenprisoners.org
California Coalition for Women Prisoners



Jessica Nowlan, Executive Director, jessica@youngwomenfree.org
Young Women's Freedom Center



Amika Mota, Policy Director, amika@youngwomenfree.org
Sister Warriors Freedom Coalition

Cc:

Sara Smith, Chief, Office of the Ombudsman, Sara.Smith@cdcr.ca.gov

Dr. Joseph Bick, Director, Correctional Health Care Services, joseph.bick@cdcr.ca.gov

Senator Nancy Skinner, Chair, Senate Public Safety Committee,

senator.skinner@senate.ca.gov

Assembly Member Sydney Kamlager, Chair, Select Committee on Incarcerated Women,

Assemblymember.Kamlager@assembly.ca.gov