

March 30, 2020

BY EMAIL

Mr. Timothy C. Ward
Commissioner, Georgia Department of Corrections
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Mr. Terry E. Barnard
Chairman, Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles
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Dear Commissioner Ward and Chairman Barnard:

We write today to follow up on our previous correspondence regarding concerns about the ongoing spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) facilities. Given that the virus is highly contagious, spreading rapidly in Georgia, and has a high mortality rate, we remain concerned about the spread of COVID-19 in incarceration facilities. In addition to our previous recommendations, we request that the GDC and the State Board of Pardons and Paroles (Parole Board) consider the immediate release of certain people living in the fifteen Reentry and Cognitive Programming Centers (RCPC), also referred to as “Transitional Centers.”

Since our last correspondence, the growing number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Georgia has been staggering. The Georgia Department of Public Health is reporting 2,683 cases, 678 hospitalizations, and 83 deaths in the state as of 7:00PM on March 29.¹ There are now multiple confirmed cases of COVID-19 in GDC facilities, and one person incarcerated at Lee State Prison died last week.²

¹ Georgia Department of Public Health, *COVID-19 Daily Status Report* (March 27, 2020), <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-19-daily-status-report>.

² Georgia Department of Corrections, *COVID-19 Response Update* (March 27, 2020), <http://www.dcor.state.ga.us/NewsRoom/PressReleases/georgia-department-corrections-covid-19>

*Please be aware that our office has moved, and our address is now:
60 Walton St. NW / Atlanta, GA 30303.*

As of March 1, 2020, there are 2,280 people in an RCPC/Transitional Center and at least 91 are over the age of 60.³ These individuals are at a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 because of the work release requirement, which requires them to work in communities outside of the transitional centers. Worse, the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in RCPCs/Transitional Centers is higher than in other GDC facilities because many participants are returning from potentially infected communities to live with hundreds of others who could have been exposed to the virus in closely confined spaces. Moreover, people in these programs must use the public transportation system and work in closely confined spaces such as poultry plants and warehouses.

To reduce the spread of the virus and potential loss of life in RCPCs/Transitional Centers, and to comply with the current best practices for correctional facilities provided by the National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC), we encourage the implementation of the following measure:

Schedule Immediate Release for Certain People at Reentry and Cognitive Programming Centers/Transitional Centers: We urge the Parole Board to consider the immediate release of people held at the fifteen RCPCs/Transitional Centers in a manner consistent with the health and safety of Georgia communities. People over the age of 60, those with underlying health conditions, and those who have completed most of the program requirements at an RCPC/Transitional Center should be considered for immediate release, and the Parole Board should provide a release date.

Sincerely,



Sara Totonchi
Executive Director

³ Georgia Department of Corrections Office of Information Technology Data Management Section, *Inmate Statistical Profile Active Inmates in Transitional Centers* (March 1, 2020), http://www.gdc.ga.gov/sites/all/themes/gdc/pdf/Profile_transitional_ctr_2020_02.pdf.