



# FAITH IN TEXAS

*The Power of Faithful People*

Re: COVID-19 is a matter of life and death and we must act now

March 25, 2020

Dear Hon. Tammy Kemp, Presiding,

In Texas, we are just weeks into an unprecedented pandemic of COVID-19 statewide. We are bracing for these numbers to get worse. Take New York, for example, where a small handful of confirmed cases three weeks ago has exploded now to over 10,000 cases and 112 deaths statewide, at a rate that is doubling every two days. We must act decisively and responsibly to protect all of us -- our incarcerated loved ones, and those who work in courts, jails, and prisons, as well as our entire community.

We are not alone in the call to reduce the number of people in jail. In Texas, we have seen [Bexar County](#) has released over 200 people from the jail already and the [Harris County](#) Sheriff Ed Gonzalez is pushing for “bold action” to avert a potential health crisis and is seeking the compassionate release of hundreds. [Travis County](#) has taken similar steps to reduce its jail population.

Nationally, [Los Angeles](#) has released over 600 people from their jail to address overcrowding and the threat of COVID-19. [New Jersey](#) announced it will release 1000 people. Jails in [New York](#), [San Francisco](#), and [Cleveland](#) are doing so too. As a response to COVID-19, reducing the jail population is a commonsense -- and necessary -- measure for public health.

While we are taking steps to prevent COVID-19 infection in our community by issuing “shelter-in-place” orders directing people to stay inside, practice social distancing, and be vigilant with sanitization, these efforts will not work if we don’t act rapidly to prevent infection in the Lew Sterrett jail. People in jail are part of our community and what happens with COVID-19 inside jails impacts our overall health and safety.

To stem the spread of this deadly virus, we must drastically reduce the number of people in jail and limit new admissions to exceptional circumstances. **We call on you, Hon. Tammy Kemp, and your colleagues to do the following:**

- **Immediately release anyone who is being held pretrial, and all people held on probation and parole technical violation detainers or sentences.**
- **Immediately release all people serving a sentence who are within six months of their release date.**



These demands are especially important because we understand that jury trials have been halted and we do not want there to be even more undue pressure on people being held to agree to a plea agreement for a crime they are not guilty of.

**To ensure that our incarcerated community is not left behind or forgotten in this public health crisis, we ask that you and your colleagues order these releases by this Friday, March 27th, at 1:00pm.**

We have cc'd Radiance Bean from the Democratic Socialists of America, David Villalobos from the Texas Organizing Project, Victoria Love from the Black Youth Project 100, and Dominique Walker from the ACLU, TX as we are working in solidarity for this urgent effort.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned:

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Texas Organizing Project



Texas



DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA - NORTH TEXAS

