



# 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 Dallas County Sheriff Marian Brown,

**We are reaching out to you due to concern for our incarcerated loved ones. This is a terrifying time and we need answers to know that they are being cared for and active steps are being taken to keep them healthy.**

**Will you please host a virtual town hall on Friday March 27th to provide us with the answers to these questions? We are terrified and need to know that our loved ones are being appropriately cared for and that plans are in place to make sure that they are not currently waiting to meet their deaths in your jail. Please host a town hall by Friday and let us know what your plans are and if you intend to meet these requests.**

**1. Have you addressed the care inside?** We would like for you to immediately develop and implement testing protocols for all people who live, work and visit inside jails. Publish departmental COVID-19 protocols and provide regular online updates for the public, officials and media on the impact of COVID-19 on people inside the jails, including data on both incarcerated people and staff. Make transparent the exact steps that will be taken to prevent infections, and plans to care for those who become sick. This preparation plan should include the frequent and deep cleaning of transportation vehicles, facilities, clothing, and bedding in all shared and private spaces, as well as the use of more effective disinfectants, and ensure incarcerated persons have adequate access to sanitation supplies upon request.

We have the right to know how the people we love are being cared for during this very terrifying time. These are our family members and we need to know that steps have been taken to increase the frequency of keeping this space sanitary. We are aware that you have closed down the commissary and have shut down visitation. We need to know that our family members are still getting these supplies. **Are you providing our loved ones with these supplies for free? Can you provide us with an answer to these questions by 1:00 p.m. this Friday March 27th, 2020?**

**2. The Sheriff's Department should work with the Department of Health and Human Services** to immediately identify medically vulnerable people in the general population and specifically in the pre-trial population, then coordinate with the District Attorney's Office to petition the court for their immediate release. This includes, but is not limited to, people age 55 and older, pregnant people, people with compromised immune systems such as: chronic lung conditions, hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS, diabetes mellitus, hypertension, asthma, and/or cardiac disease who will be most vulnerable to COVID-19 infection.

Social distancing at the CDC's recommended six feet is not possible here which puts these populations at an even greater risk. We know that the CDC has recommended that people 65 and older are at an increased risk. We do not yet know how COVID-19 will interact with pregnant



people or their fetuses. Also people with compromised immune systems are sitting ducks waiting to be infected and without the proper defense mechanism in place to protect themselves. This includes people with HIV/AIDS and cancer. COVID-19 is extremely destructive to the interstitial tissue of the lungs. Those with chronic lung diseases already have extensive scarring and a decreased lung capacity and cannot handle additional stress on their lungs. Those with diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases are also at an increased risk due to slower healing processes. They have an increased risk of heart attack or stroke and will have much more negative outcomes after contracting COVID-19. These diseases often have comorbidities that make the healing processes harder. **Can you provide your process for identifying people with these conditions and how many people in custody fit this criteria by this Friday March 27th at 1 p.m.?**

**3. Provide a list of all low level offenses to the District Attorney by Friday March 27th at 1:00 p.m.** so that cases can be reviewed and considered for release. Most people that are still in jail for low level offenses are likely still incarcerated because they could not afford their bail. These people have not even been convicted of a crime yet, however by continuing to incarcerate them during this outbreak you are giving them a death sentence. If someone cannot afford a \$500 bail, right now do they deserve the death penalty? Releasing these people now is one of the fastest ways we can reduce congestion in the jail, slow down the spread of the virus, and avoid being an executioner to people that have not been convicted of a crime.

**4. Cite and release** all those who are eligible under Texas Code of Criminal Procedures (Article 14.06), rather than booking them and potentially introducing COVID-19 into the jail system. Reducing these unnecessary incarcerations would reduce the risk of transmitting a virus between the facilities — jails — and the community, and vice versa. Continuing current practices could contribute to a swell in the incarcerated population which in turn increases the risk of transmitting the virus.

**5. Immediately suspend arrests and/or bookings** of individuals suspected of technical parole or probation violations. **Are these check-ins going to be virtual now? Will you provide the resources for virtual check-ins or will you punish people for not having those means?** Again, further transparency on your current processes will help us understand how our newly released loved ones could be held accountable and manipulated to re-enter the system. Any additional bookings or arrests will bring a person from the outside into our jail system and this could cause a massive outbreak within our jail population.

**6. Guarantee access to phone calls, mail and court hearings.** Incarcerated people already experience prolonged isolation from their families and communities. Fear of exposure should not be justification to further isolate incarcerated people, nor keep them from their right to due process. Provide safe and accessible no contact visitation options to families and defense council, such as no-cost virtual visitation, continue to provide access to mail, and phone calls to provide reassurance to families worried about their loved ones inside and increase access to legal counsel. In the interest of justice and public safety, incarcerated people should have access to expedited court hearings. These actions should be temporary and are not a permanent replacement for in-person visitations, which should be reinstated as soon as possible; as to not interrupt the social well-being of the incarcerated population.



**7. Extend paid sick leave to all employees,** including those with temporary/part-time employment status. County trustees who do not feel well should not be forced to work. They are free to leave. However, our loved ones that are incarcerated cannot distance themselves from the employees. So they are forced to encounter any diseases the employees bring to the jail.

**8. Eliminate any and all medical co-pays or sick call fees.** You can put a freeze on copays so that people can seek the medical attention they need immediately without further putting the rest of the incarcerated population at risk. Since the commissary has closed, how can we make sure that our loved ones are getting the care that they need if they cannot make the payment? **Can you provide us with additional information by 1 p.m. on Friday on how healthcare will be administered during this outbreak?**

**9. Eliminate any and all coordination with ICE and CBP.** Our immigrant community deserves to feel safe enough to deal with this crisis without the fear of deportation. During this crisis, ICE detainer requests or “holds” should be suspended. Will you make the decision to do this? This will also protect your employees. ICE and CBP travel at a federal level across state lines further increasing the risk that when your staff come into contact with them, they will also contract COVID-19. For the sake of your staff and our loved ones that are incarcerated, please decrease the traffic in the jail by discontinuing your affiliation with ICE and CBP.

**Again: Will you please host a virtual town hall on Friday March 27th to provide us with the answers to these questions? We are terrified and need to know that our loved ones are being appropriately cared for and that plans are in place to make sure that they are not currently waiting to meet their deaths in your jail. Please host a town hall by Friday and let us know what your plans are and if you intend to meet these requests. Again we are asking:**

- 1. Will you make your COVID-19 department protocols public? Can you make your sanitation routine public? Are you providing our loved ones with hygiene supplies at an increased frequency during this outbreak?**
- 2. Can you provide a list of people that are in the high risk category by Friday March 27th?**
- 3. Can you provide a list of low level offenses to the District Attorney by Friday March 27th?**
- 4. Can you provide us with additional information on virtual probation/parole visits?**
- 5. Can you provide us with details on how healthcare will be administered to those in jail during this outbreak by Friday March 27th?**
- 6. Will you host a virtual town hall and provide transparency to the above questions by Friday?**

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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*The Power of Faithful People*



Texas Organizing Project



Texas



DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA - NORTH TEXAS

