



ACLU of  
Connecticut



Connecticut  
Bail Fund



Global Health  
Justice Partnership

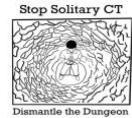


Katal Center for  
Health, Equity, and  
Justice

Allard K.  
Lowenstein  
International  
Human  
Rights  
Clinic at  
Yale Law  
School\*



Sex Workers &  
Allies Network



Stop Solitary  
Connecticut

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## CT Coalition Pens Open Letter to Governor Demanding Emergency Action to Protect Incarcerated People and Public from COVID-19

A coalition of Connecticut-based organizations has published an [open letter to Governor Ned Lamont](#) calling for urgent action to protect individuals in the state's prisons and jails from the Coronavirus-19 pandemic. On March 16, 2020, the coalition spoke to press about the threat COVID-19 poses to incarcerated people in Connecticut and explained the emergency measures the Governor must take to limit transmission and save lives. The letter was co-authored by the ACLU of Connecticut, the Connecticut Bail Fund, the Global Health Justice Partnership, Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice, the Sex Workers & Allies Network, Stop Solitary Connecticut, and the Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic at Yale Law School.\*

Among the measures demanded by the coalition are the immediate reduction of the prison population through the release of currently incarcerated individuals and a moratorium on further incarceration. The open letter emphasizes the particular need to release individuals over age 55 and others who have heightened vulnerability to losing their lives to COVID-19.

“My brother is currently incarcerated,” said D’anna, a member of the CT Bail Fund. “He is my best friend. My son's godfather. He has been there for me through thick and thin, including when we were homeless together. He is only 21 years old, and he is being held pretrial on a bail amount we can't afford—all because he allegedly missed court. I am scared right now for his safety and survival. Do you think the crime of missing court should be punishable by death? Do you think the crime of being poor should be punishable by death?”

“In our time of crisis, it’s very necessary that we take consideration for our incarcerated population. In prisons and jails, we have some of the most at-risk groups of catching COVID-19,” said Josh F., a Member of the Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice. “As a formerly incarcerated person, I know how fast viruses can spread inside. It’s time that we release them to slow down this crisis. The best judge of character in a society is how we treat incarcerated people

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during a crisis. Let's do the right thing." Kenyatta Thompson, Senior Community Organizer for the Katal Center, spoke at the coalition's virtual press conference announcing the letter.

The open letter emphasizes that by their very nature, prisons and jails put incarcerated people at risk by precluding appropriate prevention measures. "It's no secret that DOC provides inadequate healthcare on a regular basis. To put our faith in such a system to really support our loved ones in such a critical time is worse than irresponsible — it's murderous," said Jewu Richardson, a community organizer with the CT Bail Fund. "We are calling on the government to immediately release all people from jails, prisons, and immigration detention centers as an urgent public health measure."

KCM Campbell-Morrison, the Spiritual Advisor for the Sex Workers & Allies Network, emphasized that a moratorium on incarceration is a key part of the necessary response to the pandemic. "It is crucial the state does not arrest any new people. We must ensure that vulnerable populations, such as the unhoused and people who use drugs, are not driven underground during this crisis. Aggressive police action against vulnerable populations precludes SWAN and other outreach groups from reaching people with medical and harm reduction supplies to keep them safe. Arresting people for trespassing, loitering, and other petty crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic risks their lives and creates a community health hazard."

The letter also calls for protections for those who must remain behind bars. The coalition demanded guaranteed access to high-quality and respectful medical care, including preventive care, medical testing, and prompt treatment. They urged that solitary confinement, which is internationally recognized as a form of torture—[including as it is used in Connecticut prisons](#)—never be used as a measure to prevent infection; the letter highlights that cells' shared HVAC systems mean that increasing time-in-cell may not effectively prevent COVID-19 transmission.

"I feel it's necessary for Stop Solitary CT to be a voice for the people who are invisible in our society. Incarcerated people are at a higher risk from COVID-19, and the public must understand that solitary confinement is not a solution," said Barbara Fair, a member of Stop Solitary CT's steering committee. "There are so many actions the Governor can take to release individuals from prison and keep them out of that high-risk setting—he can start by releasing people who are incarcerated for technical parole violations or for being unable to pay bail."

"I've spent a lot of time in prison on violations, and I've learned that 90 days in prison can destroy a lifetime of hard work. Due to the COVID-19 I know first-hand how this virus can spread throughout the prison," said Sylvester E., a Member of the Katal Center. "Incarcerated people will not get the treatment necessary to survive this epidemic. I think people with technical violations, and people waiting for trial, should be released immediately."

The coalition emphasized that, under current law, Governor Lamont has the authority and the obligation to take emergency action to protect those incarcerated by the state of Connecticut in times of public health crisis.

"People who are incarcerated are at serious risk right now due to the close quarters, poor sanitary conditions, and lack of healthcare access in Connecticut prisons and jails," said David McGuire,

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Executive Director of the ACLU of Connecticut. “The state should take immediate action for public health and safety by reducing incarceration as much as possible now, before it is too late. By taking swift action for decarceration, Connecticut could prevent people who are incarcerated and correctional workers from becoming sick or worse.”

“Our current system of jails, prisons and detention centers is inherently harmful and unsafe for all people, and crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbate the dangers of incarceration,” said Poonam Daryani, a Clinical Fellow with the Global Health Justice Partnership (GHJP). “The GHJP calls on Governor Lamont to release as many incarcerated people as possible, as soon as possible, and to cease arrests and any new admissions.”

The coalition emphasized that families and communities also suffer as a result of the threat to incarcerated lives. “My husband is in immigration jail right now,” said Xiomara of the CT Bail Fund, “and I am very worried about his safety and health. I’m not just worried about his physical health, but also his mental health. Jails are not safe places for anyone, but they are even less safe in the middle of a pandemic. We are like a lot of families in this situation, and I think that if the governor is going to take measures to protect our community, that community needs to include immigrant families.”

The open letter is being regularly updated with the names of organizations and individuals who have signed on in support of the call to action. As of 5:40 PM on Monday, March 16, 65 total organizations and 927 individuals had added their names to demand action from the Governor.

“The outpouring of support in less than 48 hours has been tremendous,” said Hope Metcalf, Lecturer at Yale Law School and faculty member in the Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic. “People across the state understand what is at risk for people behind bars and that our fates are inextricably linked. Governor Lamont needs to understand that we are not willing to let some people sink while the rest of us stay afloat.”