

**For Immediate Release**

**Press Contact:**

**Arely Diaz, Lead Organizer (AMOR-RI)**

**(201) 665-9358**

**[arely.diaz19@gmail.com](mailto:arely.diaz19@gmail.com)**

## **Community Groups Demand Public Health Investigation of Bristol County Jail**

*The fight for racial justice requires accountability at one of  
New England's most notorious and dangerous facilities for human caging.*

Today, community groups across Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island submitted a formal complaint to local and state public health officials demanding an immediate investigation into the unsanitary conditions, brutal mistreatment, and public health crisis facing the individuals caged inside the Bristol County House of Correction (BCHOC). The complaint was filed by the Connecticut Bail Fund, Boston Immigration Justice Accompaniment Network, Alianza para Movilizar Nuestra Resistencia, New Haven Legal Assistance Association, Inc., Connecticut Immigrant Rights Alliance, Hartford Deportation Defense, Doctors for Camp Closure, and Massachusetts Bail Fund, represented by the Worker & Immigrant Rights Advocacy Clinic at Yale Law School and Lawyers for Civil Rights.

The groups filed a complaint with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Dartmouth Board of Health detailing BCHOC's violations of state law in utterly failing to protect the health, safety, and wellbeing of individuals in their custody. At least 31 individuals have died inside the facility since 2008, the most deaths in any jail in Massachusetts. The complaint seeks action to avoid adding yet another name to that grim statistic.

Since the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, individuals caged inside BCHOC have expressed constant fear of a COVID-19 outbreak as a result of the inhumane and unsanitary conditions. In the past few months, their physical and mental health conditions have worsened as the crisis grows worse and the Sheriff's department does little to assuage their fears. Instead, individuals who raised concerns about the conditions have faced violent retaliation and "the hole"—or solitary confinement. Moreover, individuals report that the medical unit—consisting of freezing cells where the lights are rarely turned off—closely mirrors "the hole." Already, at least 34 staff members and 32 individuals in state and immigration custody across BCHOC have tested positive for COVID-19. The urgency of the crisis at BCHOC requires immediate investigation.

"Sheriff Hodgson holds people at BCHOC without access to adequate soap, towels, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and other necessary hygienic materials and many have not had regular access to showers," said Vanesa Suárez, deportation defense organizer at Connecticut Bail Fund. "People in immigration custody have reported blood and feces in their cells, lack of clean clothing, freezing temperatures, broken bathrooms, and denial of access to medical care and prescribed medications."

"The health of those inside is in severe crisis. They're essentially being forced to starve. People have been subject to insufficient meals and undrinkable, contaminated water. Even when they try

to order more food through the canteen, they've been denied access to their orders," continued Suárez.

"The brutality of the conditions inside BCHOC endangers not only those incarcerated there, but all of us, because every day staff walk into and out the jail, spreading the virus to all with whom they come into contact," said Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen a volunteer with the Boston Immigration Justice Accompaniment Network.

"Local and state public health authorities have a joint responsibility to safeguard the public health of all of us – people incarcerated, staff, and the community at large. These officials have the authority to intervene, and they need to exercise it *now*. Every minute matters," said Atara Rich-Shea, executive director of the Massachusetts Bail Fund.

"After violent confrontations by BCHOC officials on May 1, 2020, dozens of individuals who had raised concerns about the conditions in the facility were thrown into the hole," said Rev. Annie Gonzalez Milliken, a volunteer with the Boston Immigration Justice Accompaniment Network. "Some of these individuals remain in solitary confinement, over 40 days later—an inhumane and traumatizing practice that is considered a form of torture under international law. They continue to sit in horrific conditions and freezing temperatures."

"The Sheriff's department has also used pepper spray and tear gas against those detained, making it impossible for people to breathe—this horrifying tactic is another example of BCHOC's violent retaliation," said Constanza Segovia, organizer at Hartford Deportation Defense. "This violence and neglect have exacerbated the physical and mental suffering of the individuals whom they cage."

"These deeply unsanitary conditions, coupled with the Sheriff's continued use of retaliation tactics like prolonged solitary confinement, presents a public health emergency requiring immediate inspection," said Dr. Bonnie Arzuaga co-founder of Doctors for Camp Closure. "The fight for racial justice requires accountability at BCHOC, one of New England's most notorious facilities for human caging."