

## Open Letter: CONTAIN COVID-19, NOT PEOPLE

*As all levels of government call on people to prioritize health, protocols to protect the health of people who remain imprisoned have been insufficient. **As people and organizations dedicated to supporting individuals who are imprisoned and their communities, we are concerned about the lack of protocols to protect and prioritize the health of those who remain behind bars. People should be released to the extent possible. We demand a response to COVID-19 that leaves no one behind and centres those most impacted.** Due to existing unsanitary conditions, close quarters, frequent physical contact, and the underlying chronic health conditions of many detained people - jails, prisons, immigration detention centers, juvenile detention facilities, and courthouses pose specific challenges that threaten the health and wellbeing of our communities. To combat the spread of COVID-19 and prioritize everyone's health, we must adopt an approach that centres the needs of criminalized people and those made vulnerable to the virus by social inequality.*

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- I. Take immediate action to reduce the number of people in prison, jails, and detention centers:
  - **Release all youth** to the care of family and community.
  - **Release from prison and jails individuals who will become particularly vulnerable should they contract COVID-19** - including people who are over 50, pregnant or immunocompromised.
  - **Extend the temporary absence program and release people in pretrial detention** who are legally innocent and those serving sentences who are not considered an immediate danger to the community - including (but not limited to) those waiting on sureties, probation violation hearings, or parole revocation proceedings.
  - **Release all immigrants and refugees** from jails and immigration detention centers. Do not conduct immigration enforcement operations, especially in or around shelters, hospitals, or medical clinics.
  - **Suspend arrests, prosecutions, and pre-trial detention** for all non-violent charges. Allocate resources for community-based transformative justice responses.
  
- II. Take immediate action to protect those who remain imprisoned:
  - **Provide soap, hand sanitizer, bleach, and cleaning supplies to every prisoner at no cost.** Ensure that those who are arrested are held in locations where they do not share toilets, soap, utensils, or bedding.
  - **Solitary confinement should not be relied on for health and safety.** Increase access to fresh air spaces with safe social distancing for anyone who is detained.
  - In the absence of visitations, **all phone calls and other forms of contact should be free.** Restrictions on calls to cell-phones and switchboards should be lifted immediately.
  - **Ensure medical programs are fully funded, accessible, and staffed.** Provide training, protective gear, and regular testing for incarcerated persons and staff in the facilities. Ensure the availability of medications and treatments.
  
- III. Take immediate actions for the health of the poor, precarious workers & the criminalized:
  - Make COVID-19 testing and treatment free and available to all.
  - Legislate two weeks of paid sick days for all workers and provide emergency financial support for unemployed people and people without immigration status.
  - Impose an immediate moratorium on eviction and foreclosure proceedings.
  - Immediately end fare enforcement on public transit.
  - Impose an immediate moratorium on all utility shut-offs and restore shut-off utilities.
  - Ensure the availability of medications and treatments including opioid-substitution.

- Cease the criminalization of drug use and provide funding for harm reduction and supervised consumption.

IV. Take immediate actions for the health of the region's unhoused population:

- Provide locations for unhoused people to self-quarantine in individualized spaces.
- Provide emergency shelters that can remain open 24 hours a day with 3 meals a day. Provide 24-hour access to soap, hand sanitizer, water, showers, and restrooms.

***We call on our local, provincial, and federal officials to publicize protocols and take the preceding immediate actions for our collective health.***

**Signed,**

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 Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies  
 Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network  
 Canadian Prison Law Association  
 Carceral Studies Research Collective  
 Climate Justice Edmonton  
 Climate Justice Montreal  
 Climate Justice Toronto  
 Criminalization and Punishment Education Project  
 Decent Work and Health Network  
 East Coast Prison Justice Society  
 Elizabeth Fry Society of Manitoba  
 Elizabeth Fry Society of Peterborough  
 Elizabeth Fry Society of Toronto  
 Empowerment Council: A Voice for the Clients of CAMH  
 First Grace Community Alliance  
 Foundation for Liberating Minds  
 IGNITE Global Feminist Collective  
 Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee  
 Independent Jewish Voices  
 International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network - Canada  
 Jail Accountability & Information Line  
 Journal of Prisoners on Prisons  
 Joint Effort  
 Law Union of Ontario  
 Legal Aid for All  
 Mashed Economies Artist Collective  
 Millennial Womxn in Policy  
 Millennium for All - Winnipeg  
 Movement Defense Committee  
 No More Silence  
 No One is Illegal  
 Ontario Coalition Against Poverty

Ottawa Sanctuary City Network  
Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre  
PASAN - Prisoners with HIV/AIDS Support Action Network  
Prison Justice Network  
Prisoners' Legal Services in BC  
Red Braid Alliance for Decolonial Socialism  
Ryerson Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy  
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