



### **Prison Advocacy & Covid 19 Project Summary:**

GP NOW members gathered educational links and created an informational webinar out of a desire to mobilize our membership and interested community members to take action on prison advocacy, especially urgent due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **Elements include:**

Prison Solidarity and Reform Webinar  
Key Action Items/Messages  
Prison Advocacy & COVID-19: Let's get educated  
Contacts and Resources for Action

### **Prison Solidarity and Reform Webinar- Briefing**

**Filmed:7/26/20**

**Length 1 hour 11 min.**

**Webinar Youtube Video Link: <https://youtu.be/cQrramFVkl0>**

#### **Summary of webinar:**

Introductions & updates from selected OR organizations and advocates serving incarcerated persons and current challenges faced due to COVID-19.

**Topics include:** Legal Services, census, visitation, health care access.

See webinar participant list & detailed synopsis of webinar below.

#### **Key Action Items/Messages:**

***Inadequate and inappropriate handling of the pandemic by ODOC creates a severe public health risk. The foundation of risk reduction for COVID-19 is to release eligible adults in custody to appropriate transitional services.***

- State corrections officials told Gov. Kate Brown that 5,800 inmates – an estimated 40 percent of the prison population – would have to be released to allow for proper social distancing. 3,244 are eligible for early release. Gov. Brown has rejected these recommendations, despite support for the recommendation by prisoners,

protestors, and correctional officials. Thus far, less than 70 people have been released.

- Report from Rebecca Whitstine: People have been reported as released but not yet released! Follow up on this needed!
- Action: Identify specific advocacy/lobby messages & targets for actions.

***Advocacy and access is direly needed, in order to provide safe phone and online visitation, confidential phone calls with legal and transitional support, and an overall sense of safety in our prisons.***

- Inmates have been cut off from all activities & services due to COVID-19 pandemic.
- "Prisoners are getting COVID and hiding it because they are treated punitively and put in segregation and lose all of their privileges. Or they are getting COVID and
- not being allowed to be tested, being told it's just allergies. It has created a mass impairment for prisoners psychologically and also physically."
- Action: Identify specific advocacy/lobby messages for actions around access to services and family and friends

## **Links for Prison Advocacy & COVID-19: Let's get educated & take action**

**The most current information published by the Oregon Dept. of Corrections is on their COVID-19 Case Tracking Page (ODOC) which includes details in the FAQ:**  
<https://www.oregon.gov/doc/covid19/Pages/covid19-tracking.aspx>

**COVID-19 and the Correctional Environment: The American Prison as a Focal Point for Public Health** was published on April 17th 2020 by The American Journal of Preventive Medicine. It is an assessment of the issues and impacts of COVID-19. It has numerous recommendations worth reviewing. It concludes with: "Although the correctional environment is often considered distinct or isolated from the wider society and health system, the well-being of correctional workers and prisoners is inexorably linked to the health of the country as a whole."

[https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(20\)30144-6/fulltext](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(20)30144-6/fulltext)

**The Prison Policy Initiative** is tracking pandemic-related criminal justice policy changes, issuing recommendations to state and local criminal justice agencies, including selected demand letters and policy recommendations and busting common myths about COVID-19 and the justice system. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/virus/>

### **Mass Incarceration Threatens Health Equity in America**

This 2019 report by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation provides good information on this general topic. Obviously COVID-19 creates additional layers of challenges, but this has excellent foundational information:

<https://nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/publications/mass-incarceration-threatens-health-equity-in-america/>

### **Oregon's Prisons Struggle With COVID-19 And Its Impact On People Behind Bars:**

<https://www.opb.org/news/article/oregon-coronavirus-covid-19-prisons-health/?fbclid=IwAR1CwpujsZ1lbtuVgnFEloaM4bPty4Bn4XT2Olijb1EOQzJEUy72me5NzXQ#:~:text=Tar%20Herivel%3A%20%22We%20know%20that,is%20in%20quarantine%20as%20well>

**Prisoners and protesters decry conditions among Oregon state prisons as COVID-19 spreads among facilities: The number of prisoners in quarantine outnumbers tests conducted 6 to 1.** Published in Street Roots April 29th, 2020

<https://www.streetroots.org/news/2020/04/29/prisoners-and-protesters-decry-conditions-among-oregon-state-prisons-covid-19>

**CAGED: Little recourse for Oregon prisoners: Complex administrative rules and changes to federal laws often leave inmates feeling helpless** Published by Street Roots in 2017 but relevant related background info.

<https://www.streetroots.org/news/2017/08/25/caged-little-recourse-oregon-prisoners>

**Prison Advocacy & Covid 19 Project  
Contacts and Resources for Action:**

**Email and Call Your Legislator:** This is the single most powerful relationship you can develop in Oregon's current political landscape. Express your concern for incarcerated persons, the unsafe and unjust conditions they face, and the associated greater public health risks of COVID-19.

Use Google to find your legislators: enter your **zip code** and "**senator**" to find your senator; do the same with "**representative**" to get your state rep. Their personal legislature page will pop up and you can email or call them. You will be talking to their legislative assistants and chiefs of staff. Visit them when they are home in your district nearby or go to Salem to talk to them in their office there. "I am your constituent and I vote, and this is something I care about" is a powerful message.

**Director of Prisons:** Colette Peters [colette.s.peters@doc.state.or.us](mailto:colette.s.peters@doc.state.or.us)  
Remember to cc your state senator and representative on your emails to Ms. Peters. Remember to keep copies of your communications with her office.

**Office of the Inspector General:** Telephone number: (877) 831-0389  
You may want to use this as a place to report abuse in terms of refusal of appropriate testing and medical care during the pandemic. Please be aware that all complaints are referred back to the Department of Justice to a DOJ rep assigned to the DOC. This is a way to create a record, at least. In general this has not been found to be unresponsive to community concerns.

**Governor's Office of Constituent Services:** Telephone number: (503) 378-4582  
Link to form to request assistance:  
<https://www.oregon.gov/gov/pages/request-assistance.aspx>  
This contact source will send you back to the DOJ rep embedded with the DOC. However, every contact creates a record of your concerns to bring to your legislators.

**Governor's Staff:** <https://www.oregon.gov/gov/Pages/staff.aspx>  
Use this page to find any staff you may be looking for as a way to try to connect to the Governor, i.e. General Counsel to discuss prison issues.

**ACLU:**

Telephone number: (503) 329-9740  
Call this number to request help with any COVID-19 concerns. Call this number to request a habeas corpus packet. It is registered so prisoners can use it. Ask for staff attorney Kelly Simon.

