

Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic

Last update: June 01, 2020

Newest page updates:

- Since a March 25th executive order, Colorado has released 290 people early from state prisons. (See [prison releases](#) section.)
- In North Dakota, the Cass County Jail population dropped 30% and the Stutsman County Jail population dropped 50% since mid-March. (See [jail releases](#) section.)
- Only three states have not suspended medical co-pays for people in state prisons: Nevada, Hawaii, and Delaware. (See [medical co-pays](#) section.)

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See our [main coronavirus page](#) for other resources.

Prisons and jails are [amplifiers of infectious diseases](#) such as the coronavirus, because social distancing is impossible inside and movement in and out of facilities is common. But criminal justice officials have the power to prevent coronavirus deaths.

On this page, we're tracking which state and local governments are taking meaningful steps to protect people behind bars (and the general public). We've also published a [detailed guide to what the criminal justice system should be doing](#), as well as [several other resources](#) about the coronavirus in prisons and jails.

Jails releasing people

Jails and prisons house large numbers of people with chronic diseases and complex medical needs who are [more vulnerable](#) to COVID-19.

One of the best ways to protect these people is to reduce overcrowding in correctional facilities. **Many jails are already making these changes:**

- On April 6th, California set an statewide emergency bail schedule that [reduced bail to \\$0](#) for most misdemeanor and some low-level felony

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offenses. Since then, California jail populations have dropped. In Los Angeles County and Sacramento County, jail populations have decreased by over 30%. Orange County's jail population has dropped by almost 45%, while other counties — including San Diego, San Mateo, and Stanislaus — have released hundreds of people held pretrial. (May 27)

- In North Dakota, the Cass County Jail population has declined by over 30% since mid-March, and the Stutsman County Jail population has dropped by about 50%. (May 26)
- Following an April 5th order from the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, which authorized the release of people held in jails pretrial for “nonviolent” offenses and those held on technical probation and parole violations, both the Plymouth County and Norfolk County jails have reduced their populations by around 20%. The Bristol County jail population, meanwhile, has decreased 11% since April 5th. (An April 14th story previously reported that 300 people held in jails across the state had been released as a result of the court order.) (May 20)
- In Colorado Springs, Colorado, the El Paso County Jail population has dropped by about 30% from February to May. News reports are unclear about how the county achieved these population cuts. (May 20)
- In Miami-Dade County jails, in Florida, the jail population has reportedly dropped from about 4,000 people before the pandemic to about 3,200 people -- about a 20% decrease in the average daily population. This reduction is the result of efforts by “lawyers and judges.” (May 19)
- In March, Ohio courts in Cuyahoga County (Cleveland) and Hamilton County began to issue court orders and conduct special hearings to increase the number of people released from local jails. Since March 10th, the Cuyahoga County jail has released about 900 people, reducing its population by more than 30%. (May 13)
- The Northwestern Regional Adult Detention Center in Virginia has reduced the jail population by about 20% from the daily average of the past 5 years. Most people who were released were placed on probation. (April 29)
- In Charles County, Maryland, people have been released from jail following recent bail hearings and people serving short weekend sentences, and the jail is now reportedly “at less than 30% capacity.” A county public

Prisons releasing people

defender reports that of the 60 motions for release that he has filed, 30 Prisoners have been released as of April 28, 2011 when compared to local jails, as we explain in Human Rights in a Jail but state prisoners are piled up in preexisting 16% overcrowded conditions, the public jail re-ignites people's fear of returning to the from this of the Sonfardore movement of these state corrections departments

taking steps to reduce the prison population, ease the office of the pardon flow-

level” offenses have reportedly helped drop the jail population by

- The Colorado Department of Corrections has released 290 people following their parole eligibility date. (April 28)
- Maricopa County, Arizona, reduced the jail population since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic from an average of 7,500 to 5,300 people on April 24th (almost a 30% reduction). (April 27)

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- The Sheriff's Office reports that in Anderson County, 46 people have been released from jail since April 1st, and the population of the jail has decreased from 180 people on April 27th (within 30 days of the release date) who meet specific criteria.
- Approximately 300 people have been released from Orange County Jail in Florida since the Governor's executive order on April 10th, supposedly beginning the process of "temporarily" releasing some people.
- In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the local jail population decreased by 11% since the beginning of April, following the announcement of people released on May 15th, the Governor's executive order that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- The State Board of Prisoners in Michigan reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- On May 1st, the Nevada Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- The Oklahoma Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- The Oregon Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- The Rhode Island Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- The South Carolina Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- The Tennessee Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- The Texas Department of Criminal Justice reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- The Utah Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- The Vermont Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- The Virginia Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- The Washington Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- The West Virginia Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- The Wisconsin Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
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Reducing jail and prison admissions

Lowering jail and prison admissions reduces "jail time" — the rapid movement of people in and out of jails — and will allow the facility's total population to drop very quickly. In Pennsylvania, for example, the jail population is primarily people on probation or parole who are arrested on a technical violation of probation or parole.

- Since then, as of May 7th, 130 people have been released, and another 100 have been paroled from state prisons in Pennsylvania — including Bucks County Jail, which has a combined jail and prison population of about 1,000 people.
- Across the state of Delaware (which has a combined jail and prison system), arrests for felony and misdemeanor crimes have dropped by about 45% following the governor's March 12th emergency stay-at-home order. Some Delaware law enforcement officials attribute this to a combined effect of people adhering to the stay-at-home order and also to "changes in policing" for the safety of officers and to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- In Maryland, the Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- In Massachusetts, the Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- In Michigan, the Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
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- In New Hampshire, the Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- In New Jersey, the Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- In New Mexico, the Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- In New York, the Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
- In North Carolina, the Department of Corrections reported that 268 people had been paroled out of state prisons, but on May 21st, the DOC spokesperson stated that only 46 people had been paroled out of state prisons.
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38% The Department for Public Spaces attributes "insecure user check 90 days left

diversion efforts by law enforcement, the Public Safety's Intake Services

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Reducing prison admissions reduces the risk of viral transmission into the prison and, as a result, the community. In 2019, the state of California reported 107 weekly releases from the state prison system, compared to 107 weekly admissions. (April 28)

- The population of the Federal Correctional Institution at Carson is composed of 750 men who provide appropriate medical care.

- The governor of Colorado issued an executive order that gives the

- Department of Corrections director the authority to refuse to admit people

- **Wayne County Jail in Detroit, Michigan** has seen the jail population rise to state prisons (March 26)

- The North Carolina Department of Public Safety wants to make sure that they have in mind an executive order from the governor has halted new admissions

- to state prison facilities. In March 1982, 148 people were released to serve their sentences outside of prison, in home

- California's Governor Newsom signed an executive order naming new
- ~~new~~ ~~California~~ ~~major~~ ~~northern~~ ~~Canadian~~ ~~border~~ ~~out~~ ~~that~~ ~~this~~ ~~is~~ ~~not~~ ~~a~~ ~~Pril~~
- mistakes at California's five state prisons and the four juvenile facilities,

- significant improvement upon normal release schedules for approximately stating that the effort is to prevent transmission of the virus from jails into the community.
- 68 one-on-one released daily prior to the pandemic. The same could be

- state prisons. (March 24)

- The Regional Department of Corrections states that, in concert with law enforcement, it has arrested the DePue family members and released them to the custody of the Department of Corrections.
- In Hawaii (which has a combined civil and criminal justice system), the state supreme court has ruled that the state's law regarding parole violations is unconstitutional.

- The court appointed a special master to coordinate potential releases with public officials and to coordinate with the state supreme court.

- The Oklahoma Department of Corrections announced that they are

- reportedly granted nearly release to 655 people, following motions filed by the Kentucky Criminal Justice Office of the Public Defender, in suspending admissions of newly sentenced individuals to state prisons, in

- In early April, the Louisiana Department of Corrections created a review program to combat the virus from spreading rapidly behind prison bars.

- panel to consider people for temporary medical release. As of April 30th, people in Nevada's minimum security jails were only authorized to people whom 10 out of 52 people have been approved for release out of the 240 people to be

- considered (April 30). Instead, they like Collier for orientation and he likes her because she

- including the fact that the company's management and board of directors have not been able to identify any specific risks that could materially affect the company's financial performance. The company's management and board of directors have not been able to identify any specific risks that could materially affect the company's financial performance. The company's management and board of directors have not been able to identify any specific risks that could materially affect the company's financial performance.

Readers should be aware that over 3,000 of those 4,000 had completed their

Below we list jurisdictions that are limiting unnecessary check-ins and visits to sentenced prisoners this year. The list averaged 60 new admissions to the list and this

- Making them a gateway to 452 people held in the county jail were approved the risk of viral transmission. Given the unprecedented rate of unemployment, the

Fines & Fees Justice Center is also tracking jurisdictions suspending supervision medical marijuana compliance following an executive order from the governor.

fees for people on probation and parole. For recommended measures that

probation side panel of the state of Georgia and later during the pandemic to protect people calling for assistance in obtaining release of probationers in the only 60 courts that have under supervision, see E-X14, a response tracker and recommendations. I finished the

names of over 1,500 people to be released early from state prisons. As of

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Eliminating medical co-pays

Eliminating medical co-pays
 among low-income and home care people. The Michigan Department of Health and
 Human Services reported that in 2013, 3% of the state's population is up

- In most states, incarcerated people are expected to pay \$2-\$5 per physical visit, medications, and testing. Because the incarcerated people typically earn 1¢ to 6¢ cents per hour, these charges are the equivalent of charging a free-world worker \$200 or \$500 for a medical visit. The result is to discourage medical treatment and to put public health at risk. In 2019, some states recognized the harm and eliminated the so-called "pay-to-stay" model.
- Identified in a lawsuit in Washington and in a letter from CO, NJ, and NY and eliminated the public use of people being held pretrial and some people
- The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ordered offenses people held pretrial for non-violent offenses and those held for technical probation/parole
- In Texas County, Texas for judges to determine if they more properly local jails on personal bonds (about 50% more often than usual), focusing
- Kept out of people with health issues an arrest charge on non-violent different from 186 people in the jail system of felonies! The state also plans to
- Release 740 people in San Francisco, California and Boulder, Colorado have taken steps to release people held pretrial, with limited time left on their sentence, and charged with non-violent offenses. (March 11 and March 16)
- Read 40+ more entries

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- In Wisconsin, the Department of Corrections released 1,000 people held on probation or parole detainers (i.e. for a probation or parole violation). (April 1)
 - 2) **States that have suspended all co-pays for incarcerated people in response to the COVID-19 pandemic**
 - In the month of March, the West Virginia Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation released 700 people in prison respiratory or flu policy. The policy releases included people who were serving short prison terms and parole-related sanctions, and some people who were eligible for weekend furloughs have had their furloughs extended to two weeks. (April 1)
 - California, Alabama, Alaska, Nevada, District of Columbia, Arkansas, Arizona, Hawaii, announced on March 31 that it would expedite the transition to parole for 3,500 non-violent offenders with 60 days or less left on their sentences, with priority going to individuals with less than 30 days left. (March 31)
 - Montana, Minnesota, Georgia, The Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles has begun to review approximately 200 people for early release. They are considering people serving time for non-violent offenses who are within 180 days of completing their prison sentences (or of their tentative parole date). (March 31)
 - In New York, Governor Cuomo announced that up to 1,100 people who are being held in jails and prisons across the state may be released with community supervision. (March 27)
 - The Utah Department of Corrections has recommended over 80 people for release from state prisons to the Board of Pardons and Parole. The DOC reports that the people referred for release are within 90 days of completing their sentences. (March 26)
 - The Director of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections is submitting weekly lists of people being held on low bail amounts to the public defender's and attorney general's offices for assessment in efforts to have them released. (Rhode Island is one of a handful of states that do not have jails, meaning that pretrial detainees are held in prisons.) The state DOC is also evaluating people with less than 4 years on their sentences to see if they can apply good time and release them early. (March 23)
- Table created March 13, 2020 and last updated June 1, 2020. We welcome updates from states that have revised their policies. States can contact us at virusresponse@prisonpolicy.org. *The Delaware Department of Corrections has not changed their co-pay policy. According to the DOC's co-pay policy dated December 2019, there are no co-pays for diagnosis and treatment of contagious notification to the State Attorney's Office. The executive order explicitly states that this is an effort to reduce the prison population, which is particularly vulnerable to the COVID-19 outbreak. (March 23)*
- Read 20+ more entries

Reducing the cost of phone and video calls

Most federal prisons, state prisons and many local jails have decided to drastically reduce or completely eliminate friends and family visitation so as to reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure in facilities. In normal times, we would point to the significant evidence that sustained meaningful contact with family and friends benefits incarcerated people in the long run, including reducing recidivism. But it is even more important, in this time of crisis, for incarcerated people to know that their loved ones are safe and vice versa. While many facilities have suspended in-

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person visitation, only a few have made an effort to supplement this loss by waiving fees for phone calls and video communication. Here are two notable examples:

- The Federal Bureau of Prisons has made phone calls and video calls free. Access to these communication services is likely limited by facility-specific policies, lockdowns, and availability of video calling equipment. (April 14)
- Shelby County, Tennessee suspended jail visitations, but to maintain these vital connections between families, they are waiving fees for all phone calls and video communication. (March 12)
- The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) is providing free calls on three days each week (although there may be time limits imposed by individual facilities). (March 31)

Other jurisdictions have implemented cost reductions that - while better than nothing - still severely restrict contact between incarcerated people and their loved ones:

- The Utah Department of Corrections is giving people in prison 10 free phone calls per week, with each call limited to 15 minutes. (Calls that go beyond the 15-minute limit will incur charges.)
- Prisons in Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Vermont, and Pennsylvania are offering residents even smaller numbers of free calls per week. The same is true for jails in Middlesex County, Massachusetts; Harris County, Texas; and Montgomery County, Ohio.

Help us update this page

If you know of notable reforms that should be listed here, please let us know at virusresponse@prisonpolicy.org. We won't list everything, but we appreciate what you can send us.
