



**STATE OF INDIANA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

THIRD FLOOR STATE HOUSE
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA 46204

CHERRISH S. PRYOR
Democratic Floor Leader
200 West Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

COMMITTEES:
WAYS AND MEANS
LOCAL GOVERNMENT

April 9, 2020

The Honorable Eric Holcomb
200 West Washington Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204

Dear Governor Holcomb,

As we address pandemic challenges each day we must consider the health and safety of all Hoosiers. Efforts to flatten the curve of infections and hospitalizations have benefitted many; however, we must take further action to protect essential workers.

While many white-collar professionals are able to protect themselves and their families by working from home, essential workers in grocery stores, gas stations, public transportation, and food service do not have that option. Instead, they go to work to provide basic needs in our communities across the state. We must provide protections for these workers as they risk exposure to the virus on a regular basis. Many workers are expected to come to work with no protections whatsoever to safeguard them and their families from the virus. I urge you to provide protections for essential workers across our state who are risking their health to provide necessary goods and services.

Additionally, we must confront Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC) facilities and the unique threat that they pose in accelerating infections.

The IDOC Preparedness and Response Plan highlights a number of illness management procedures including: monitoring for disease outbreaks, separation of ill offenders, implementing social distancing when a few offenders are ill, isolation housing units when a substantial number of offenders are ill, and plans for staff and supply shortages.

However, while the plan details IDOC's adherence to CDC and State Department of Health guidelines, the illness management techniques only impose social distancing and other measures after offenders become ill. If plans for IDOC do not include proactively reducing the incarcerated population as the primary means to prevent infections, then the entirety of the Preparedness and Response Plan will be insufficient.

Recognizing the nature of COVID-19 transmission and with a growing number of staff and offenders becoming ill, Illinois and California have moved to reduce their incarcerated populations by releasing certain nonviolent offenders 30-60 days early. Correctional facilities in those states will then have space to impose social distancing for all offenders and staff.

To protect DOC staff, offenders, and communities at large from further spread of COVID-19, I urge you to collaborate with the Indiana Supreme Court to release nonviolent offenders in a similar manner.

Lastly, what is most notable about the lack of methodical and preventative precautions for essential workers and inmates is that many of them are Black. According to the Economic Policy Institute, less than 1 in 5 Black workers have the option to work from home, and the 2018 DOC Annual Report states that 32% of inmates are Black.

There has been a national conversation on how COVID-19 disproportionately affects Black communities and it is clear that many African Americans are in jobs and environments where exposure risk is high. While COVID-19's death rate among African Americans is associated with long standing pre-existing conditions that affect Black communities, we are currently not taking any action to prevent comorbidity of COVID-19 and other conditions among Black Hoosiers. To mitigate further deaths among African Americans and other communities across the state, please establish substantive policies, procedures, and protections to safeguard the health of essential workers and DOC inmates.

Please respond to my concerns by Friday, April 17th and know that I am willing to collaborate with you on any efforts to protect these groups from COVID-19.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Cherrish S. Pryor". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Cherrish S. Pryor, Democratic Floor Leader
State Representative
House District 94