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Testimony from Getting Out and Staying Out

June 9, 2020

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Getting Out and Staying Out (GOSO), GOSO is in direct touch with families of individuals vulnerable to COVID-19 who are incarcerated and is extremely concerned about this population remaining in jails where it is impossible to practice social distancing. As an organization that continues to provide direct support to incarcerated and court-involved people, GOSO calls for officials to release these individuals right away, to maintain State bail reform measures and to institute other measures aimed at reducing not increasing jail populations.

As the jail population continues to grow over the recent weeks, we remain concerned that individuals in the city jails cannot properly social distance or practice the hygienic procedures outlined by the CDC. The people who are newly admitted to DOC facilities are being tested or quarantined, but the chance of exposure to both them and individuals already in the jails remains a serious concern.

Throughout the duration of this pandemic, GOSO staff has continued to field calls, letters, and any information from family members of our participants in DOC custody. It is clear that the conditions in the city jails remain a hazard for the people who remained detained, including the 16 - 24 year old men that we work with. It remains imperative that City release as many people as possible, especially those vulnerable to COVID-19 and those who should be released but are still being held. We advocate for the immediate release of individuals being held on technical parole violations, including individuals whose parole hold may be the one matter keeping them from being bail-eligible on an additional case. Additionally, any suggestion that individuals with severe mental health diagnoses would endanger the community is stigmatizing and untrue. Individuals with severe mental health diagnoses should be not be held as a result of these diagnoses, and should be given adequate support and treatment.

In conclusion, GOSO continues to advocate for the release of many individuals who remain in custody throughout this global pandemic. We believe that they are safer in the community and GOSO remains committed to working with those who seek enrollment in our community-based program.

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