

NEW YORK CITY BOARD OF CORRECTION CALLS FOR CITY TO BEGIN RELEASING
PEOPLE FROM JAIL AS PART OF PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE TO COVID-19

*Emergency release will minimize the number of people in jail and staff needed on-site during
public health crisis. Fewer people in the jails will prevent transmission.*

Release must prioritize people at higher risk from infection.

March 17, 2020

[The New York City Board of Correction](#), the independent oversight Board for the City's jail system, is calling on the City to work with all its criminal justice partners to: (1) immediately remove from jail all people at higher risk from COVID-19 infection; and (2) rapidly decrease the jail population. While Department of Correction (DOC) and Correctional Health Services (CHS) staff continue to perform heroic work to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 in the jails and maintain safe and humane operations, the City must drastically reduce the number of people in jail right now and limit new admissions to exceptional circumstances. The City can follow the leads of Los Angeles County and Cuyahoga County (Ohio) which have already begun to release people to minimize a potential outbreak. The City must begin this process now. The City's jails have particular challenges to preventing disease transmission on a normal day and even more so during a public health crisis.

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Significantly fewer people in jail will limit the spread of COVID-19 infection among people in custody and those who work in the jails, minimize the number of people in custody who will need medical care, decrease the density of housing areas for people who remain in jail, and allow New Yorkers to maintain connections with and support from their loved ones.

DOC and CHS, along with City partners, must work with the Chief Judge of New York State, Governor Cuomo, District Attorneys, and the Defense Bar to begin identifying and releasing people this week, prioritizing:

- People who are over 50;
- People who have underlying health conditions, including lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, or a weakened immune system
- People detained for administrative reasons (including failure to appear and parole violations); and
- People serving "City Sentences" (sentences of one year or less).

Once these people are released from jail, the City must continue to work with District Attorneys, the Defense Bar, and the judiciary to identify all other detained New Yorkers who can be released from jail. DOC and CHS should provide COVID-19 screening, discharge planning, including connection to health and mental health services, for those requiring support upon release.

The Board also renews its request that DOC and CHS publish updated agency plans for preventing transmission of COVID-19 in the jails. The San Francisco Sheriff's Department has published its COVID-19 Response & Action Plan, detailing security and health plans to minimize risk of exposure in the San Francisco jails. Additionally, the Board requests DOC and

CHS increase and improve communication to people in custody, staff, and the public via all available channels and in multiple languages.

The Board is grateful for the leadership and staff of the Department of Correction and Correctional Health Services during this public health crisis. These front-line City workers are providing a remarkable public service in challenging times. The Board is also grateful to the New York community of family members, friends, and advocates who have remained committed to supporting their loved ones held in jail.

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