

March 25, 2020

Dear Governor Cuomo and Acting Commissioner Annucci,

We represent a broad coalition of faith-based organizations across New York State. We are grateful for everything you are doing right now to keep New Yorkers safe and healthy. We are inspired by your leadership, and thankful for the initiative you have shown in this time of crisis. We will work with you in this time to care for the most vulnerable in our state. We will continue to feed those who are hungry, pastor to those in isolation, and build new wells of resilience and hope for our communities. We are all in this fight for life together.

This moment calls all of us to act immediately with moral courage in order to protect and save the lives of the most vulnerable within our state. There are thousands of men and women in our New York State jails and prisons right now whose very lives are at stake. Each of our traditions teaches us that all human life is sacred. This core belief is an ethical mandate, one which must guide the way we treat and care for our fellow human beings. We implore you to enact policies and procedures right now which uphold the dignity of every person and take into account the safety of those who are incarcerated and those who work in prisons and jails.

We join together with activists from around the state and ask that New York State:

- Release a comprehensive plan for prisons and jails to effectively and swiftly reduce density and implement the social distancing measures recommended by the CDC.
- Immediately identify and move all seniors or at-risk people to separate facilities where they can be properly protected; and release such people via clemency unless doing so would pose a serious risk to the physical safety of the community, as recommended by District Attorneys across New York State and the country..
- Suspend arrests and lift warrants for technical parole violations so as not to needlessly add more people to the jail and prison populations.
- Reduce the prison and jail population by making use of alternatives to incarceration, such as supervised release programs for people accused of non-violent offenses, as a group of District Attorneys in New York have already recommended.
- Adhere to existing law on bail to avoid increasing the jail population with those accused of committing nonviolent crimes.
- Provide appropriate pay for people working around the clock to produce supplies for the State, including NY State Hand Sanitizer.
- Ensure that all people in prisons and jails have adequate access to soap and hand sanitizer, and that facilities are cleaned on a frequent basis.
- Provide additional email, phone, and letter writing capabilities for all people incarcerated who can no longer receive visitors.

Viruses do not respect prison walls. An outbreak anywhere is a danger everywhere. We must act now to protect the lives of all New Yorkers.

In gratitude and solidarity,

Rabbi Angela Buchdahl, Central Synagogue
Rabbi Hilly Haber, Central Synagogue
Rev. Dr. Serene Jones, President, Union Theological Seminary
Very Reverend Kelly Brown Douglas, Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary
Rabbi Ellen Lippmann, Brooklyn, NY
Rev. Winnie Varghese, Trinity Church Wall Street
The Rev. Matthew Heyd, Church of the Heavenly Rest
Rabbi Rachel Timoner, Congregation Beth Elohim
Rabbi Joel Mosbacher, Temple Shaaray Tefila
Ruth Messinger, Marlene Meyerson JCC, Manhattan
Sheryl Parker, Marlene Meyerson JCC, Manhattan
Meg Sullivan, JCC Harlem
Jennifer Benrey, Student Cantor, Temple Israel Reform Congregation of Staten Island
Rev. John H. Vaughn, Ebenezer Baptist Church
Rabbi Rachel Gross-Prinz, Temple Emanu-El
Jodie Siff, The Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore
Rev. Sheila M. Beckford, Wethersfield United Methodist Church
Rabbi Shuli Passow, B'nai Jeshurun
Preston Neimeiser, HUC-JIR
Joanne Kennedy, The Catholic Worker
Dean Deida, South Bronx Churches - Metro IAF
Ray Lopez, Little Sisters of the Assumption Family Health Service
Danielle Rodnizki, Central Synagogue
Leslie, Hamptons UMC
Rev. Getulio Cruz Jr., Monte Sion Christian Church
Rev. Dorlimar Lebrón, FSUMC
Jim Reagan, Catholic Worker
Jacob Leizman, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Rebecca Hecht, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Rabbi Stephanie Kolin, Union Temple
Rabbi Juliana S. Karol, Congregation Rodeph Sholom
Rabbi Ben Spratt, Congregation Rodeph Sholom
David Seth Kirshner, Temple Emanu-El
Aaron Portman, Student, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah
Andrew Mandel, Hebrew Union College
James Hannigan, Benincasa Community
Rena Singer, rabbinical student, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
Andrew Oberstein, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
Rachael Pass, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Patrick Bergquist, Episcopal Charities
Nora Feinstein, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
Rev. Angela M Redman, New Rochelle United Methodist Church
Patrick Bergquist, Episcopal Charities
Rabbi Gabi Weinberg, The Tikvah Fund

Sarah Lader, Temple Beth Ami
Rabbi Miriam Grossman, Kolot Chayeinu
Emily Aronson, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
Shani Cohen, Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion
Martha Hennessy, Catholic Worker
Lee Jason Goldberg, Congregation Beit Simchat Torah
Jeff Dreifus, Hebrew Union College
Thalia Halpert Rodis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Nora Isacoff, Congregation Beit Simchat Torah
Suzanne Hamstra, Student Cantor, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Judi Counts, Church of the Heavenly Rest
Tammy Gilden, Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Terrance Coffee, Educate Don't Incarcerate
Douglas McIntyre, Church of the Heavenly Rest
Mimi Pascual, Beyond The Box
West End Synagogue, Manhattan
Katherine Schmitt, Church of the Heavenly Rest
Josh Gischner, Student Rabbi, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
Katherine Schmitt, Church of the Heavenly Rest
Gloria Collazo, JLUSA
Joanna Cawley, Church of the Heavenly Rest
Rabbi Daniel Seth Ross, Central Synagogue
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Rabbi Nicole Auerbach, Central Synagogue
Rabbi Gail F Nalven, Manhattan
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Tammy Gilden, Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Caitlin Caruso, Church of the Heavenly Rest
Rachel Figurasmith, Repair the World NYC
Minister Onleilove Chika Alston, Beth El The House of Yahweh