

Chainless Change, Inc.
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April 2, 2020

Dear Broward County Officials:

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic taught us that in an increasingly interconnected world, small-scale behaviors can affect citizens everywhere. Steps that we take today to protect our county will have a lasting impact on our state-wide, national and global communities. We cannot afford to be reactive. The coronavirus has already put a massive strain on heavily relied-upon systems. Economies are declining. Schools and restaurants are closed. Hospitals and hospital workers are overwhelmed. People are dying.

To date, there are over [1,346 known cases of COVID-19 in Broward County, 8,010](#) throughout Florida, and [217,372 cases in the U.S.](#) Concerns about the health and well-being of our family, neighbors, and friends must be transformed into action now.

[The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) states](#) that people of any age with chronic medical conditions and those who are immunocompromised might be at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Medical experts recommend that we limit gatherings to no more than 10 people, maintain a distance of 6 feet apart from others, wear protective gear, wash hands frequently and thoroughly with antibacterial soap and water, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer, and avoid contact with exposed surfaces, objects, or persons.

Based on the [recommendations of medical experts](#), many public health officials, including the [United States Attorney General, William Barr](#), have urged that federal, state, and local corrections facilities immediately coalesce to reduce the population of jails and prisons and to halt new admissions. *Incarcerated individuals cannot isolate.* They exist in an unsanitary, overpopulated space that is ripe for the rampant transmission of contagious diseases. Inmates and corrections officers are at a heightened risk of COVID-19 infections and deaths. Limited access to medical care, testing supplies, and personal protective equipment increases the possibility of viral outbreaks.

On March 28, 2020, four [Broward County Sheriff's Office staff tested positive](#) for COVID-19. 103 additional staff members were then forced into self-isolation. Broward County Sheriff's Office is responsible for the supervision of nearly 3,400 incarcerated individuals in the county's four main jail facilities, as well as oversight of those on probation and house arrest. *Broward County does not have the sufficient manpower or resources to deliver an appropriate medical*

response if there is an outbreak in our jails. We are urging you to take immediate steps to safely reduce the jail population before it is too late.

Chainless Change, Inc. and the undersigned organizations ask that the Broward County Chief Judge, Broward County Commission, Broward County Legislative Delegation, Broward County Mayor, Broward County Public Defender's Office, Broward County Sheriff's Office, and the Broward County State Attorney's Office proactively work together to protect our loved ones, those who are incarcerated, and those who set foot in corrections facilities. We demand that all parties addressed in this letter implement the following common-sense public safety measures throughout the county:

1. Release on their own recognizance (ROR) all persons who have been charged with nonviolent offenses.
2. Suspend all cash bail. No one should be placed in greater risk of exposure to COVID-19 simply because they are too poor to afford bail.
3. Terminate the sentences and release all people who have been ordered to serve time in the county jail and have less than 100 days remaining on their sentence.
4. Issue a moratorium on new arrests for minor, nonviolent offenses and bench warrants. Issue a notice to appear instead of arresting.
5. Take all possible measures to immediately reduce the jail populations and mitigate the potential loss of life. This includes, at a minimum, the immediate release of every person 50 or older who qualifies for cash bail and those at high risk for severe illness with COVID-19 due to underlying medical conditions.
6. Create a list, which specifically outlines what offenses constitute an arrest and booking during the current pandemic. Disseminate the list to all officers in Broward County.
7. Allow free and unlimited phone calls from jails so that incarcerated persons can directly communicate with their loved ones.
8. Provide cleaning supplies, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, antibacterial soap, gloves, and masks for all inmates, officers, and staff to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
9. Establish a space for those newly admitted to be safely quarantined and tested. Implement clear procedures, which screen current and new detainees, as well as staff, lawyers, and visitors each time they enter the jail facilities. Test all persons in custody who report symptoms or who were in contact with someone experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.
10. Suspend authority of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainees and reject any agreement to house persons transferred to Broward County in ICE custody.

11. Create and expand emergency housing options for those leaving incarceration and at risk of homelessness.

12. Invest in low barrier access to in-person and remote medical care, including mental health and substance-use treatment options.

This is an opportunity for Broward County to [join leaders throughout the country](#) in taking specific actions that will protect us all. The outlined demands must be implemented so that we never have to regret steps that came too late, after the loss of lives. The health of our community rests on the ability of our officials to collectively respond with intentionality. We look forward to working with all who share our vision for decelerating this humanitarian disaster.

In solidarity,

Community Stakeholders:

Chainless Change, Inc.
ACLU of Florida
ACLU of Florida, Broward Chapter
Black Lives Matter Alliance Broward
Broward Dream Defenders
Broward Young Black Progressives
Broward Young Democrats
Change Comes Now
Community Based Connections, Inc.
Davis Legal Center
Dolphin Democrats
Fedfam4Life
Florida Cares
Florida Justice Center
Forging Alliances, Inc.
Friends of Miami-Dade Detainees
Kids Always 1st
Minority Builders Coalition, Inc.
OIC of South Florida
Positive Peer Mentoring
Probation Station
Ruth's List Broward County
South Florida Reentry Task Force
Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund
Women's March Florida-Broward Chapter

Community Leaders:

Joe Kimok, President, Broward Assoc. of Criminal Defense Lawyers
Sabrina Javellana, Vice-Mayor of Hallandale Beach
Alfredo Olvera, Realtor
Alissa Schafer, Supervisor, Broward Soil and Water
Brian C. Johnson, Vice-Mayor of West Park
Caryl Shuham, Commissioner of Hollywood
Cindy Polo, State Representative District 103
Emma Collum, Attorney and Supervisor, Broward Soil and Water
Harold Pryor, Corporate Counsel
Julie Fishman, Commissioner of Tamarac
Jasmen Rogers-Shaw, Activist
Josh Rydell, Vice-Mayor of Coconut Creek
Joshua Simmons, Commissioner of Coral Springs
Marlon D. Bolton, Vice Mayor of Tamarac
Michael Gottlieb, State Representative District 98
Mike Gelin, Commissioner of Tamarac
Nancy Metayer, Environmental Scientist
Oscar J. Braynon, State Senator District 35
Ruby Green, Broward County Public Defender
Shevrin Jones, State Representative District 101