

The Honorable J. Kevin Stitt
Governor, State of Oklahoma
Oklahoma State Capitol
2300 N Lincoln Blvd.
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

December 3, 2020

Dear Governor Stitt:

As Oklahoma looks to receive our first round of COVID-19 vaccines, the Oklahoma State Department of Health has announced a phased rollout plan. Included in Phase 1 priorities are congregate living facilities, such as nursing homes. Yet, people in the custody of the state, forced to live in congregate conditions in Oklahoma prisons and jails are relegated to Phase 2. We write you with grave concern that your administration is formalizing distribution plans that ignore the lives of people who are incarcerated, a decision that will disproportionately harm Black and Indigenous communities in Oklahoma.

As you are well aware, Oklahoma has never truly seen a reprieve from the first wave of COVID-19. In recent weeks, the outbreak has escalated, constantly shattering previous records and putting a strain on our health care system and the people who staff our health care facilities. Almost 6,000 people in Oklahoma prisons have contracted COVID-19 as of the December 2 report. Along with 9 people currently hospitalized, at least 33 people incarcerated in Oklahoma have lost their lives. Thousands more may have life-long health conditions as a result of this virus. Given that nearly 25% of people in Oklahoma prisons have contracted COVID-19 so far, greatly exceeding the infection rate for the state at large, it is clear that the unmitigated spread in Oklahoma prisons is cause for great concern.

Since COVID-19 first hit Oklahoma, the ACLU of Oklahoma has asked your administration to do anything to save the lives of people who are incarcerated. 33 people incarcerated in Oklahoma prisons and an unknown number of people incarcerated in Oklahoma jails have lost their lives as a result of inaction. When we begin to consider the impact on staff and their families, an exponential number of lives are worse because Oklahoma has failed to address COVID-19 spread in ODOC and jail facilities.

As you finalize distribution plans, you have a legal and moral obligation to protect the lives and health of the people Oklahoma incarcerates, as well as the lives and health of Oklahomans who live in communities where carceral facilities are located. You must treat Oklahoma prisons and jails with equal urgency to all other congregate living settings.



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Tanya Cox-Touré
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Nicole McAfee
**Director of Policy and
Advocacy**

We request a virtual meeting to discuss this matter with you, your staff, the Oklahoma Department of Corrections, the Oklahoma Sheriffs Association, and the Oklahoma State Department of Health. Please respond to this letter confirming your intention to meet with us by December 10, 2020. I can be reached by email at nmcafee@acluok.org or by phone at (830) 334-1660.

Regards,



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she/her(s)
Director of Policy and Advocacy
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