



## **Joint Statement from Elected County Sheriffs on COVID-19**

### Lead Signatories:

1. Sheriff Jerry Clayton  
Washtenaw County, MI
2. Sheriff Ed Gonzalez  
Harris County, TX
3. Sheriff Garry McFadden  
Mecklenburg County, NC
4. Ray Porter  
Unified Corrections Administrator  
Waldo and Knox County Sheriff's Offices, ME
5. Sheriff Eli Rivera  
Cheshire County, NH
6. Sheriff Javier Salazar  
Bexar County, TX
7. Superintendent Rick Van Wickler  
Cheshire County Department of Corrections, NH

COVID-19 presents an unprecedented crisis in our communities. Nowhere is this more evident than in jails which, like cruise ships and retirement communities, are a fertile ground for infectious disease.

Sheriffs have been put in an unprecedented position. It is, quite plainly, nearly impossible to follow the CDC recommendation for “social distancing” in our jails. As a result, jails are a unique danger to staff, inmates, and communities alike. While state prisons hold a higher number of people, jails have a constant “churn,” meaning that people flow in and out of jail, often the same people for similar offenses. As law enforcement continues to make arrests, people move in and out of the facility, often staying just a few days before their mandated release.

The vast majority of people in jail nationwide are not yet convicted of any crime. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, most of the people in county jail are held either pretrial or because of technical violations. In many places, the vast majority of people held pretrial are there because they cannot afford cash bail.

As elected guardians of our community safety, our duties include ensuring the life and dignity of everyone. People who enter our jail quickly return to neighborhoods. We recognize that allowing COVID-19 to run rampant in our jails will negatively impact our employees, jail residents, and the community at large. Sitting idle is not an option.



We commit to the following measures:

**Decreasing jail populations:** Most jails need to reduce their populations substantially to come within CDC guidelines. We will take the following steps to decrease jail population, which will protect public health and public safety:

- Identify groups of detainees who can be released into the community and work with judges and prosecutors to release these people on personal recognizance bonds; use the statutory powers granted to county sheriffs to secure their release; or release people to the custody of pretrial services for non-contact supervision. We will prioritize review of the following people:
  - Over the age of 50, pregnant women, and those with existing conditions designated as high-risk by the CDC for immediate release;
  - Held for misdemeanors or low-level felonies, including those on bond amounts \$10,000 and under;
  - Those within six months of completion of their sentence, those booked for technical and probation and parole violations, and those awaiting revocation hearings on non-technical violations or new charges who can safely be released;
  - Currently in work release or serving “split sentences;”Held under ICE detainer requests, except as required by state law. We will work with state and federal authorities to facilitate the release of people held for state Departments of Correction, ICE, and the U.S. Marshall’s Service.
- Use cite-and-release up to statutory authority to limit jail intake and encourage patrol to limit contact with individual community members if there is no immediate risk.

**Protecting staff:** Jail staff work alongside inmates all day, every day. In the community, deputies are key to maintaining order and serving the people. As such, they and their families deserve protection.

- Ensure all staff and deputies will be eligible for paid sick leave.
- Discourage employees from showing up to work if they believe they may be sick or have been exposed to the virus.
- Keep work environments as clean and safe as possible. Provide staff with proper protective equipment and hand sanitizer for use throughout the day

**Preserving life and dignity:** Because we are all in this fight together, people in jail are entitled to measures designed to protect health and safety as well as reasonable access to the outside world during this uneasy time. We pledge to follow CDC [guidelines](#) and also to:

- Work with county and city health officials to ensure suitable release plans for those who have been infected or exposed to COVID-19.



## LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTION PARTNERSHIP

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- Eliminate medical co-pays in the jail and attempt to rework contract to reduce the cost of commissary items.
- Provide cleaning products, and access to soap and water for inmates to ensure cleanliness as much as possible.
- Provide inmates with as much access as possible to family members and counsel, including free phone calls. If the phone contract does not allow for this, make best efforts to work with the provider to alter the contract.
- As much as possible, facilitate communications between inmates and their attorneys in a way that protects attorney-client confidentiality.

We take seriously our obligation to protect the public and recognize that times of great tribulation require the strength of great leaders. As elected sheriffs, sworn to protect all within our custody and reach, we believe that it is time to move swiftly and decisively. None of us want to look back on this moment and wonder if we could have done more. Instead, we advance bravely forward and hope to bring our communities through this pandemic stronger and more united than ever.