

COALITION CALLS ON CITY OF RICHMOND TO HALT NEW JAIL ADMISSIONS AND RELEASE ALL PEOPLE INCARCERATED IN RICHMOND FACILITIES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 VIRUS

RICHMOND, VA - We, the undersigned organizations, call on Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney and Richmond Sheriff Antoinette Irving to immediately release all of the people currently held in Richmond facilities and halt any further incarceration. We further urge Richmond General District Court Chief Judge L.B Cann III and Richmond Commonwealth's Attorney Colette McEachin to stop funneling more people into Richmond's jails—this step must include continuing all current court cases so that defendants are not charged with a Failure to Appear for self-quarantining.

With the recent arrival of COVID-19 (coronavirus) in our city, it is only a matter of time before it spreads to our incarcerated populations, whose crowded living conditions and lack of adequate medical care make them uniquely vulnerable to the virus. The City of Richmond has taken several laudable steps to curb the spread of COVID-19, including issuing a moratorium on water and wastewater disconnections—yet incarcerated people remain conspicuously absent from the city's plans.

It is [well-established](#) that jails and prisons are inherently unhealthy environments where access to quality medical care is limited by expensive co-pays and structural capacities. It is fair to say that even before the arrival of COVID-19, Richmond's incarcerated population was experiencing a health crisis. However, the close living quarters in jails, combined with the high number of elderly and otherwise immunocompromised incarcerated people, make our present situation especially dire—without serious decarceral action, Richmond's jails [will inevitably worsen the spread of the pandemic](#). Reporter Kelsey Kauffman of The Appeal writes: “While fewer than one million people are in jail today, 10.6 million will cycle through them this year. Indeed, many people are there for only a few days—just long enough to catch the virus and take it home with them, if not to your neighborhood, then perhaps in line behind you at the supermarket or within six feet on public transit.”

None of the City of Richmond's current COVID-19 management plans sufficiently address the urgent needs of our incarcerated people. The only way to guarantee that incarcerated people, jail staff, attorneys, judges, and visitors do not circulate the virus amongst each other and out into their personal networks is to release everyone currently being held and provide all affected personnel with paid sick leave. For the sake of public health, and in the name of justice and compassion, we demand that the City of Richmond give this problem its only practicable solution: release of all incarcerated people and suspension of new jail admissions.

Sincerely,

Richmond Community Bail Fund
Richmond Tenants Union
Legal Aid Justice Center
Richmond Public Defender's Office
Court Watch RVA
River City Medic Collective
Richmond Uncuffed
Richmond Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)
Antifa Seven Hills
Scuffletown Anti-Repression Committee (STARC)
No Atlantic Coast Pipeline
People's Justice Alliance

Indie Lab RVA