
Information on seeking early release of incarcerated people in Illinois

The John Howard Association independently monitors Illinois correctional facilities, policies and practices, and advances reforms needed to achieve a fair, humane and effective criminal justice system. We understand how enormously stressful this is for the people in prisons seeing the virus spread, and the range of emotions you must feel when you're unsure about how your loved one is doing and the best way to protect him/her. JHA is using all of the reports you share as well as information we receive from you and those who are writing us from inside Illinois' prisons to advocate for you and your incarcerated family members and friends during this crisis.

Along with increasing testing and ensuring adequate medical care for everyone, JHA has been advocating for the immediate release of people in custody. There are many people particularly vulnerable in prison in crowded, under-resourced conditions who can be successful upon release.

For those seeking information about how to get your loved one released early, we can share the information we have collected. There is no form to request release, but it is our understanding that IDOC and the Governor have and are continuing to consider people for early release and furlough. The Governor has been weighing in on release decisions which slows the process and may impact who is considered.

That being said, [the Governor issued an order on April 6, 2020](#) giving IDOC wide discretion in giving medical furloughs to medically vulnerable people in their custody. JHA is advocating for IDOC to define medically vulnerable in the broadest possible terms and to be fair when considering people for furlough – meaning that the crime of conviction should NOT be the determining factor in whether or not someone is furloughed.

1) GET UPDATED INFORMATION FROM IDOC

JHA urges you to reach out to IDOC directly in order to gather and document information shared about your loved one. IDOC has established a COVID-19 call center which should be answered Monday through Friday 8:30am – 4:30pm at 217-558-2200 ext. 7700, or you can email them at doc.covid@illinois.gov. We've heard from a few people that the person answering this hotline was helpful, and the staff person was able to share whether their loved one was on a list for early release. You can also [view their COVID-19 response page](#) for information.

JHA is interested in hearing about your experience and IDOC's response; if you are willing, please share your experience with us [using our online form](#).

2) SHARE YOUR CONCERNS WITH YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Contact the Governor's office to advocate for the release of your loved one and other people in custody. As a state department, IDOC is ultimately beholden to the determination of that office. Governor Pritzker can be contacted as his Springfield office at (217) 558-3085, or his Chicago office at (312) 814-5240.

Lt. Governor Stratton leads the state's Justice, Equity and Opportunity Initiative. She can be emailed at ltgovstratton@illinois.gov, or reached at either her Springfield office at (217) 558-3085 or Chicago office at (312) 814-5240.

Contact your elected state and local representatives to put pressure on them to support releasing individuals in IDOC generally, and your loved ones specifically.

- You can find your elected officials contact information by contacting the State of Illinois at (217) 782-2000 or (312) 814-3500 to get specific numbers for members of the General Assembly, or [get contact information for all your elected representatives here.](#)

A major political hurdle for more immediate and significant release relates to housing. We suggest making your loved one's housing availability clear in your communications.

3) SHARE INFORMATION WITH PLAINTIFFS' COUNSEL

There are litigators and civil rights groups who are asking for the immediate release of medically vulnerable people during the COVID-19 crisis. If your loved one is medically vulnerable, you should reach out to them to share information that may assist with ongoing efforts or litigation.

For People in the Cook County Jail:

In alliance with the Chicago Community Bond Fund and the Civil Rights Corps, the following groups filed a lawsuit against Cook County Sheriff Thomas Dart, which resulted a judicial order to improve conditions:

- Loevy & Loevy (312) 243-5900
- Roderick and Solange MacArthur Justice Center (312) 503-1271

For People in IDOC:

The following civil rights attorneys and community advocates are seeking ways to use the courts to release of those state prisoners who are most medically vulnerable:

- Equip for Equality (312) 341-0022
- Illinois Prison Project (312) 324-4463
- Loevy & Loevy (312) 243-5900
- Roderick and Solange MacArthur Justice Center (312) 503-1271
- Uptown People's Law Center (773) 769-1411

4) STAY IN TOUCH WITH JHA

Please continue to keep us updated about what you are hearing from inside the prisons, as well as details about your experience with IDOC or your elected officials. Given the high volume of calls, emails, and letters we are currently receiving, we are not able to respond to every communication we get, but please know we are receiving, tracking and using all the information we get to advance our advocacy efforts. [You can contact us using this online form.](#)