



ORLEANS PUBLIC DEFENDERS

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March 11, 2020

Hon. Marlin Gusman, Sheriff
City of New Orleans
2800 Perdido Street
New Orleans, LA 70119

Dear Sheriff Gusman:

As the first positive cases of the coronavirus have been announced in the New Orleans area this week, we write to express our concerns about our clients currently housed in the custody of the Orleans Parish Sheriff (OPSO). It is not a matter of if, but when the coronavirus will enter jail facilities. OPSO daily houses more than 1,000 incarcerated people, many of whom are elderly or have health conditions that compromise their immune systems, leaving them vulnerable and at greater risk for infection or death. These are people who cannot take control of their own safety and healthcare and instead must rely on the Orleans Parish jail system to provide it for them.

People jailed in Orleans do not have the option of “social distancing” from others who might be sick. They live in close proximity to each other, sharing the same living space, showers, sinks, and toilets. Separating sick people from well people to prevent the further spread of the disease is nearly impossible.

Jail conditions also make it difficult for people to follow the Centers for Disease Control’s other recommendations for preventing the spread of the coronavirus including frequent washing of hands. Sinks are frequently broken and unusable. Tiers are routinely placed on lockdown, which prevents people from accessing a shower on a frequent basis. People in jail often cannot access basic hygiene items, including soap, unless they are lucky enough to have a family member or friend place money on their books in order to purchase these items.

The Orleans Public Defenders Office requests that Sheriff Marlin Gusman make public OPSO’s plan for preventing a coronavirus outbreak and responding to any detained people who are diagnosed with the coronavirus. These plans should include, but not be limited to:

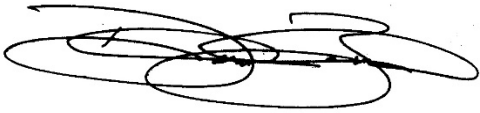
1. Steps to ensure that all new arrestees are immediately screened for the virus;
2. Quarantine plans for those diagnosed or exposed to the virus at a hospital, not in jail, where the disease can further spread and where access to healthcare is limited;
3. Greater precautionary measures to reduce the spread of infection, including increased cleaning measures and ready availability of running water, soap and other disinfectants, and tissues; and
4. A requirement that anyone placed under quarantine be able to maintain contact with their legal counsel and family members.

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Many of these measures are cost-neutral, and all are cost-effective as compared to a rapid outbreak and the havoc it would create for our clients and the staff within the jail. Indeed, an outbreak within our criminal legal system places many hundreds – if not thousands – of people at risk of this very fast-moving infection.

The time to implement these measures is now.

Sincerely,



Derwyn Bunton
Chief District Defender, Orleans Parish

CC:

Hon. Latoya Cantrell
Mayor, City of New Orleans
1300 Perdido Street
New Orleans, LA 70112

Hon. Helena Moreno
President, New Orleans City Council
1300 Perdido Street
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Hon. Jason R. Williams
Vice President, New Orleans City Council
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Hon. Joseph I. Giarrusso, III
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Hon. Jay H. Banks
Councilmember, District B
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Hon. Cyndi Nguyen
Councilmember, District E
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Hon. Leon A. Cannizzaro, Jr.
District Attorney, Orleans Parish
619 S. White Street
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Hon. Karen K. Herman, Chief Judge
Orleans Parish Criminal District Court
2700 Tulane Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70119

Hon. Harry Cantrell, Magistrate Judge
Orleans Parish Criminal District Court
2700 Tulane Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70119

Hon. Laurie A. White, Section A
Orleans Parish Criminal District Court
2700 Tulane Avenue
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Hon. Tracey Flemings-Davillier, Section B
Orleans Parish Criminal District Court
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Hon. Benedict J. Willard, Section C
Orleans Parish Criminal District Court
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Hon. Paul A. Bonin, Section D
Orleans Parish Criminal District Court
2700 Tulane Avenue
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Hon. Keva M. Landrum, Section E
Orleans Parish Criminal District Court
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Hon. Robin D. Pittman, Section F
Orleans Parish Criminal District Court
2700 Tulane Avenue
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Hon. Calvin Johnson, Section G Ad-Hoc
Orleans Parish Criminal District Court
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Hon. Camille Buras, Section H
Orleans Parish Criminal District Court
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Hon. Darryl A. Derbigny, Section J
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Hon. Jason L. Daniels, Section K Ad-Hoc
Orleans Parish Criminal District Court
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Hon. Franz L. Zibilich, Section L
Orleans Parish Criminal District Court
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Hon. Paul N. Sens, Chief Judge
Orleans Parish Municipal and Traffic Court
727 S. Broad Street
New Orleans, LA 70119

Hon. Robert E. Jones, III, Division B
Orleans Parish Municipal and Traffic Court
727 S. Broad Street
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Hon. Mark J. Shea, Division D
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Hon. Joseph B. Landry, Division F
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Hon. Steven M. Jupiter, Division G
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Hon. Herbert A. Cade, Division H
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