

# Justice Reform & Human Rights in a Time of Crisis: Releasing People from Detention

**April 2020**

During these times of crisis and uncertainty, it is critical to pull together as a community to ensure that we are all protected against the global threat of COVID-19. Our collective survival demands nothing less.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposes the systemic inequities in this country's incarceration and detention policies. This crisis presents a stark moment to address a health and safety threat to all of us, as well as to strive for justice and address systemic inequities directly. For example, a patchwork approach to bail policies and pretrial detention means that too many people are detained without having been convicted of anything, leaving far too many people unjustly serving while also facing what are *de facto* death sentences due to prison conditions and the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Because there have been an increasing number of infections within the confined spaces of many jails, prisons, and detention centers, it is more important than ever to continue advocacy for justice reform and the release of people who have not had due process. Below are important values to uplift to ensure that your communications are rooted in shared values.

## Our Shared Values

Highlight these shared values to illustrate the importance of releasing people from detention facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 📌 **Human Rights and Dignity.** We must protect the human rights of everyone, including people who are currently detained or incarcerated. Our commitment to human rights and respect for the dignity of human life depends on immediate action. Failing to prevent avoidable death during this pandemic would threaten our commitment to basic human rights and respect for human dignity.
  
- 📌 **Our Identity.** How we respond to this crisis will define our identity for generations to come. Ensuring that we respect the dignity of people who have been detained in our bloated detention system is critical to our legacy. We must be able to reflect on our collective response to this crisis and be able to say that we did the right thing, leaving no one behind.



- ❓ **Shared Responsibility/Community.** We should come together as a community to protect the most vulnerable among us. Many people who are detained or incarcerated are especially vulnerable to COVID-19, and we have a responsibility to provide them with a safe environment and protect them. We need to band together as a community and develop a plan to quickly remove vulnerable populations from detention.
  
- ❓ **Community Safety.** The COVID-19 pandemic makes clear that the use of detention and incarceration for social problems threatens actual public safety and public health as the virus spreads within the carceral system. Reducing incarceration and releasing people from detention facilities across the country would help us achieve true community safety by protecting the health and safety of everyone in our communities, including individuals who are detained.

## Sample VPSA Message

In order to deliver a consistent, well-framed message, we recommend structuring messages in terms of **Value, Problem, Solution, Action**. In particular, leading with shared values instead of dry facts or hot rhetoric helps launch a conversation and provides a foundation to transition into more complex messages.

**Value:** The COVID-19 pandemic is a clarion call for communities everywhere to come together. We are all in this together because we are all only as safe as those members of our community who are most at risk.

**Problem:** People throughout this country are detained in crowded detention centers, jails, and prisons. These systems of detention and incarceration are unsafe, unsanitary, and unable to provide an environment of safe, physical distancing during this global health crisis.

**Solution:** Government officials should begin to rapidly release vulnerable people from our bloated and crowded detention facilities so that they can practice physical distancing and, at the same time, be able to experience due process -- particularly those who have not stood trial but are still detained.

**Action:** Please call/email/Tweet/Facebook message your local politicians to demand that they release the most vulnerable people from prisons, jails and detention facilities.

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