

MEDIA ALERT

For Immediate Release

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Residents to Demand People in Holding Center be Released Amidst Coronavirus Pandemic. *Protestors to creatively protest from their cars, call on local judges and legislators to release those most vulnerable during the current public health crisis.*

Buffalo, N.Y. -- Residents from across Western New York will hold a coronavirus-safe rally in their cars outside the Holding Center to draw attention to the lives of the people locked behind bars during this public health crisis. Those attending will include members of Showing Up for Racial Justice, Black Love Resists in the Rust, Release Aging People in Prison, WNY Peace Center, PUSH Buffalo, Queers for Racial Justice, Buffalo Anti-Racism Coalition, the family of Connell Burrell who died in 2019 in the Holding Center, and Citizen Action.

On Tuesday, March 24th at 5:00pm, residents plan to demonstrate their solidarity with those held inside the Holding Center and call on local legislators and judges to release people held to prevent the spread of coronavirus. It will be a COVID-safe, car-only rally—participants will drive in circles around the Holding Center area, honking and showing their support for the people inside. Sheriff Howard’s track record combined with the deadlines of the coronavirus has many people across the region worried about the lives of the people inside.

“Under Sheriff Howard’s watch, 30 people have died in the Holding Center,” said Christian Parra of Citizen Action. “That number could skyrocket in the coming weeks. We need action now. Sheriff Howard cannot be trusted to take care of the lives of people who are incarcerated in the Holding Center.”

“Sheriff Howard cannot care for people inside his jails under normal circumstances - and nothing about this moment is normal”, said Josie Diebold member of SURJ Buffalo. “We don’t believe that judges who sentenced people wanted them to be sentenced to coronavirus. It’s not too late for us to do the right thing as a community and release people in the Holding Center and Alden as soon as possible in order to save lives.”

Specifically, they are calling on local legislators, officials to and judges to halt new bookings and release as many people as possible, especially:

- People incarcerated on “technical violation”
- People incarcerated pre-trial on bondable offenses

- People who have fewer than 6 months of their sentence remaining
- People who have compromised immune systems or asthma, cancer, hepatitis c, lung disease, and diabetes
- Members of the aging community

The group is also demanding that people in county jails be allowed to make phone calls and access masks, warm water and soap, screenings, and other lifesaving precautions.

Many of the people in the Holding Center and Alden Correctional facility are incarcerated for technical violations of their parole or probation or for breaking the conditions of a court program, not for committing a crime. People can be re-incarcerated for infractions such as missing a curfew, missing an appointment with a parole officer or not finding housing or a job within the mandated timeline.

Local municipalities across the country have already begun releasing people from jails and prisons as a public health measure. In Los Angeles the Sheriff's department has already released over 600 people from the county jails. On Sunday, the Florida State Attorney issued new guidance to release all people in Miami-Dade County arrested for misdemeanor and nonviolent charges to reduce coronavirus exposure. In New York City, the Brooklyn attorney announced this weekend that low-level offenses that don't jeopardize public safety will not be prosecuted during the coronavirus outbreak.