



# Justice Roundtable Urges Congress to Protect, Release, Support Reentry of Incarcerated People: Group Holds Media Call

*EVENT: Media call to discuss need for Senate leaders to develop COVID response bill that protects people who are incarcerated or reentering communities.*

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Justice Roundtable Urges Congress to Protect, Release, and Support Reentry of Incarcerated People in Its COVID Response Package

WASHINGTON – The Justice Roundtable, a coalition of 100 organizations committed to criminal justice reform, today lambasted Senate leaders for contemplating a COVID response bill that fails to protect people who are incarcerated and reentering from carceral settings nationwide. On May 5, 2020, the Justice Roundtable sent a letter with over 75 organizational signatures to the House and Senate leadership outlining the importance of including provisions to protect, safely release and facilitate the reentry of incarcerated people in the COVID-19 response package. The group will host a media call on Wednesday, July 29 at 1:00 p.m. ET. Register here to participate.

“Incarcerated people and correctional staff remain uniquely vulnerable to infection,” said Nkechi Taifa, a human rights attorney and convenor of the Justice Roundtable. “Failure to reduce incarceration rates overall have resulted in COVID-19 outbreaks and deaths in correctional facilities nationwide. The Senate must not consider or pass any measure that does not include protections for incarcerated people and correctional staff.”

In the May 5 letter, the signers warned that if Congress failed to respond to the COVID-19 risk in incarceration and detention facilities, the damage would negatively impact individuals, families and communities nationwide. While many of the recommendations from the Justice Roundtable were included in the HEROES Act, Congress needs to do more to prevent more COVID-19 infections, illness, and death among incarcerated and reentering individuals and staff. This is a matter of protecting both personal and public health.

“Congress must understand the critical importance of addressing COVID-19 in carceral settings and upon reentry,” said Jenny Collier, co-chair of the Justice Roundtable’s Reentry Working Group

and principal at Collier Collective, LLC. "Experts nationally have been speaking out publicly on this issue for 4 months. Advocates sent a detailed letter nearly 3 months ago warning of the risk and outlining requests that would help Congress, states, localities, and community-based organizations respond effectively."

Failing to act decisively to slow the spread of the coronavirus inside carceral settings has led to more deaths and higher infection rates. For instance, there have been over 100,000 infections among incarcerated people even though there is little testing of this population, and almost 1,000 COVID-19 deaths.

"The conditions inside many facilities are extreme, with persons facing widespread lockdowns, an inability to social distance, and little opportunity to recover once they become ill," said Kara Gotsch, co-chair of the Justice Roundtable's Sentencing Reform Working Group and director of strategic initiatives for the Sentencing Project. "Failure to act immediately will lead to exponential growth in infections and deaths that could have been prevented. Delay will also slow the nation's ability to overcome COVID-19."

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