

March 12, 2020

Administrator Yvonne Evans
Farmville Detention Center
508 Waterworks Road
Farmville, VA 23901

Dear Administrator Evans:

We are writing to urge you to immediately develop evidence-based and proactive plans for the prevention and management of COVID-19 in the Farmville Detention Center and to consider granting humanitarian parole to people at the highest risk in the event of COVID-19 outbreak.

People in detention facilities are highly vulnerable to outbreaks of contagious illnesses. They are housed in close quarters and are often in poor health. Without the active engagement of the administration, they have little ability to inform themselves about preventive measures, or to take such measures if they do manage to learn of them.

We ask that you immediately reach out to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services or the Virginia Department of Health to develop plans to address the virus in the facility. This is an urgent matter. Having an appropriate, evidence-based plan in place can help prevent an outbreak and minimize its impact if one does occur. Not having one may cost lives.

While the plan should be developed collaboratively by your facility and the Department of Health together, some of the critical issues that must be addressed are:

- **Education of the people in your custody:** People housed in detention centers need to be informed about the virus and the measures they can take to minimize their risk of contracting or spreading the virus. They must be educated on the importance of proper handwashing, coughing into their elbows, and social distancing to the extent they can. Information about the spread of the virus, the risks associated with it, and prevention and treatment measures must be based on the best available science.



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Executive Director



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- **Education of the staff:** Administrative and medical staff all must be educated about the virus to protect themselves and their families, as well as the people in their custody.
- **Staffing plans:** There must be a plan for how necessary functions and services will continue if large numbers of staff are out with the virus.
- **Provision of hygiene supplies:** The most basic aspect of infection control is hygiene. There must be ready access to warm water and adequate hygiene supplies, both for handwashing and for cleaning.
- **Screening and testing of the people in your custody:** The plan must include guidance, based on the best science available, on how and when to screen and test people in your facilities for the virus.
- **Housing of persons exposed to the virus:** The plan must describe how and where people in the detention facility will be housed if they are exposed to the virus, are at high risk of serious illness if they become infected, or become sick with it. *This should not result in prolonged, widespread lock-downs or solitary isolation.* Any lock-downs or interruptions in regular activities, such as exercise or visits and phone calls with families or attorneys, should be based solely on the best science available and should be as limited as possible in scope and duration.
- **Treatment:** Courses of treatment must be evidence-based, available immediately, and in compliance with scientifically-based public health protocols.
- **Vulnerable Populations:** The plan must provide for additional precautions for those who are at high risk of serious illness if they are infected, such as pregnant women and people with chronic illnesses, compromised immune systems, or disabilities, people over the age of 65 and people whose housing placements restrict their access to medical care and limit the staff's ability to observe them. We urge you to consider granting humanitarian parole to those most vulnerable to COVID-19 exposure.
- **Data collection:** The collection of data regarding COVID-19 will be part of the public health response. As with any contagious disease, data collection is critical to understanding and fighting the virus. The detention facility must be part of this process. The same information that is tracked in the community must be tracked in the detention centers.

We are closely monitoring this situation because of the importance of ensuring that all individuals in your custody are treated with dignity and care. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or if you wish to discuss further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Claire Guthrie Gastanaga".

Claire Guthrie Gastanaga
Executive Director

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