



April 3, 2020

The Honorable Larry Hogan, Chair
The Honorable Andrew Cuomo, Vice Chair
National Governors Association
444 North Capitol Street, Suite 267
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Chair Hogan and Vice-Chair Cuomo,

The situation in our correctional facilities is dire, the dynamics of which are changing daily. In the past few days officers in Michigan, New York and New Jersey have died from COVID-19. They will not be the last. Hundreds more across the nation have tested positive and thousands face quarantine. Inmates in our custody are dying as a result of this virus.

During this state of national emergency surrounding coronavirus (COVID-19), correctional officers and other staff across the country are being asked to report for duty amid rapidly changing and dire circumstances. As you know, the 24/7 nature of corrections make it a critical profession where staff cannot simply stay at home with their families and self-isolate and are instead asked to perform their duties, often with limited or no protections.

We have adopted the enclosed 15 point Resolution to establish base line standards that we believe must be adopted to contain this pandemic and support officers and staff working in our correctional facilities. Although some agencies are exceeding the measures we propose, which we applaud, many others do not reach the safeguards contained in our Resolution.

The diversity of security levels, inmate classification systems and architectural design of our state and local facilities make it impossible to mandate "one-size fits all" policies. As of today, the Federal Bureau of Prisons has issued a nationwide 14-day lockdown of all federal facilities. But, in many facilities locking down the entire inmate population is not physically possible. As such we believe the officers doing the job and the administrators overseeing operations are best suited to determine which options fit the safety and security needs of staff and those incarcerated.

The lack of a minimum agreed upon standards is making the job of corrections staff more dangerous and unpredictable.

Due to these inconsistencies, we fielded a survey to hear directly from the men and women facing this challenge, in hopes of gaining a better understanding of how this pandemic is impacting them and other staff across the country.

In only two weeks, we've heard back from 750+ correctional officers and staff about the ways in which the COVID-19 virus is impacting our prisons, jails and juvenile detention facilities.

Some highlights from the survey responses that we would like to draw your attention to include:

- Only 7% of respondents said their facility was "very" equipped to handle this emergency or a crisis of this magnitude before it hit
- When asked what is happening inside facilities causing the greatest anxiety among officers and staff, the top three answers were:
 - Lack of proactive testing
 - Poor communication contributing to stress and uncertainty
 - Lack of protective gear such as gloves and masks
- 67% of respondents said neither they, their union or line staff had been invited to help with building any protocols or new operating procedures since COVID-19 hit in the United States
- 62% of respondents said they DO NOT have all the tools needed to do their job in this time of crisis related to the coronavirus pandemic
- 59% of respondents said problems/hazards inside their facility related to this pandemic remain unaddressed

As you can see, this unprecedented pandemic has caused a lot of concern about how departments, officers and staff have reacted and raised questions about what they plan to do moving forward.

Attached to this letter you will find a Resolution, authored by One Voice and the American Correctional Officers Intelligence Network (ACOIN) and co-signed by union presidents and leaders who represent corrections officers across the nation.

This Resolution calls for governors across the United States to immediately implement a series of policies and actions that will help to limit the spread of COVID-19, and protect and support those working and living inside prisons. **Respectfully, we ask that the National Governors Association (NGA) create a mechanism to discuss and adopt this resolution as well as engage and encourage governors across the United States to work with their corrections departments on immediate implementation of these recommendations. We would like to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss how we can work together to make this happen.**

The resolution speaks to unique pandemic related issues being experienced by staff and recognizes the operational challenges, safety concerns and layout issues that are inherently problematic in prisons.

While the full resolution is attached, below is a summary of the key requests that we wish to address during the NGA meeting regarding the need to provide greater protection for all correctional officers and staff during this pandemic:

- All correctional officers and staff should be provided hazard pay when reporting for duty during this time;
- All sick time or any other personal leave accruals used for COVID -19 should be reinstated;
- In addition to masks and gloves, every correctional facility shall receive an immediate and adequate supply of PPE's including adequate cleaning supplies, working thermometers and the like; and
- Line of duty death benefits should be extended to the families of all corrections staff who contract COVID-19 and pass away as a result.

As our governors, you know that COVID-19 is spreading rapidly in our prison system. We ask that you act to ensure proper investment in the safety of officers and staff.

Additionally, we need the NGA to work with other governors and instruct departments to engage directly with frontline staff to develop effective strategies and plans for slowing the spread of the virus and for caring for officers and their families as well as the people who are incarcerated on a massive scale.

The magnitude of this crisis will only continue to grow and the risks are far too grave to be further ignored. That is why we have garnered support from a broad-based coalition of labor leaders across the country, from the president of SEIU to the president of the United Mine Workers Association, and the auto workers along with presidents of several other independent corrections unions, who are collectively urging that this resolution be taken seriously.

Thank you in advance for considering this request. We hope we can count on you to support the health and safety of those working in corrections.

Respectfully,
Andy Potter, One Voice
Brian Dawe, ACOIN

One Voice - Founded in 2016, One Voice is a national initiative that seeks to forge a path in which corrections staff and reform leaders can work together to ensure that our system of incarceration is rooted in human dignity and is safe and effective for the general public, incarcerated individuals, visitors, service providers and most importantly - staff. The primary objectives of One Voice are to: help national reform leaders and policy makers understand that investing in corrections staff is a key ingredient in transforming the conditions of confinement; expand the reform agenda to include the voices, priorities and concerns of frontline staff; and engage corrections staff and law enforcement in the national reform conversation, give them a seat at the table and provide an opportunity for them to become advocates for a sustainable approach to incarceration.

ACOIN - The American Correctional Officer Intelligence Networks (ACOIN) mission is to share best practices among corrections professionals and to make it safer for everyone behind the walls. AFL-CIO affiliated unions, Independents, FOP, PBA's and individual Officers comprise our membership. Since 2007 we have been researching the best practices in corrections and providing studies, reports, expert testimony as well as hosting conferences and educational forums nationwide. ACOIN is also the founding organization of the COPTSD156 Coalition dedicated to addressing correctional mental health.