



OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Vermont State House

115 State Street

Montpelier, VT 05602

February 23, 2021

Mr. Sam Shinn
8A Grandview Terrace
Rutland Vermont 05701

Dear Sam,

Thank you for taking the time to contact my office. I appreciate you sharing your views on Vermont's incarcerated population and for bringing the article you shared to my attention.

I share your concerns on the health of incarcerated Vermonters. I support the immediate vaccination of Vermont inmates and the deeply necessary reforms to our correctional facilities to ensure the safety and health of Vermonters in the State's care. I also believe we must bring home Vermonters held in the out-of-state privately run prison in Mississippi.

Thank you again for sharing your views which I will raise with legislative leaders and Governor Scott. I am deeply committed to elevating the voices of Vermonters in Montpelier, and I hope you will not hesitate to contact my office again.

I wish you good health as we work together to ensure Vermont recovers stronger from this pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Molly R. Gray".

Molly R. Gray
Lieutenant Governor of Vermont

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My name is Sam and I am deeply concerned about Vermont's incarcerated populations amidst the coronavirus pandemic. The vaccine rollout must prioritize this vulnerable group, as nearly 250 incarcerated Vermonters have tested positive since March 2020, as well as nearly 50 staff members. Attached is an article titled "Misinformation, inadequate Resources, and a Possible Death Sentence": "Imagine being locked in a cage and spit on by someone who may have the coronavirus; stripped of hand sanitizer, soap, and toilet paper while living in a hall with dozens of strangers; or fed misinformation and facing punishment for publicising your dreadful conditions. This is the life that some New York State prisoners have been facing during the coronavirus pandemic.

"The actions taken to prevent the coronavirus from spreading in prisons are just as atrocious as the absence of testing. One change implemented at the Fishkill Correctional Facility (where 6 people have died from COVID-19) is that instead of sitting next to each other in the dining hall, inmates now sit one chair - a mere arm-length - apart.

Useless policies like this will not stop the spread of the coronavirus, especially when healthcare supplies are being withheld from prisoners. Many correctional officers at Fishkill have been stealing the hand sanitizer that has finally been delivered to the prison, while the units of 35 inmates only receive at max two bottles of watered-down bleach each day to clean their quarters with. Even the units that are quarantined are not properly cleaned or given additional disinfecting supplies.

"The correctional officers' control of information exacerbates the dangers of the coronavirus. The names of infected correctional officers and inmates are withheld from inmates - even if they were in direct contact with them. "Over a month ago a contact told us that his neighbor was removed from his cell and that his inquiries into why the neighbor was removed or whether he was still alive weren't answered. It took a member of Court Watch to inform him weeks later that his neighbor had died in the hospital. More troubling, the prison nurses are hiding inmates' body temperatures from them. A contact saw 35 people contract the coronavirus and only 2 reported temperatures above 98 degrees. One of the inmates had a temperature of 105 degrees but instead of being sent to a hospital, he was sent back to his room and threatened that if he spoke to anyone, he would be sent to second-stage quarantining, where he could not shower, call loved ones, or have access to his personal property.

"The reason that we seldom hear about the inadequacies and corruption of prisons in their handling of the coronavirus is that correctional officers control inmates' speech to outside sources. Several months ago, a member of Court Watch received a physical letter from a contact in prison, instead of the prison's online communication service, because he was afraid that the correctional officers who read the online messages would punish him for relating his experience of the prison's handling of the coronavirus pandemic. Another contact said that by speaking out about the current conditions in the prison, he risks being placed into isolation or worse.

"Every story gathered from those who are incarcerated entails risks for those telling them, so make sure that their words don't go unheard. As one contact who is incarcerated said, 'You can't watch a bomb explode and then try to contain the explosion.' Let's implement adequate testing and spread-reduction measures to stop the coronavirus before it completely explodes."

Though this account comes from a facility in New York, its message cannot go unheard. Conditions in Vermont's prisons could be different, but chances are, they are not. Vermont urgently needs a portion

of its vaccine rollout to go to our incarcerated community members. These people are suffering. Let us put a stop to it. Thank you,