



**For Immediate Release**  
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**Civil Rights Organizations Demand Southern Officials Protect  
the Health and Safety of Incarcerated People from COVID-19 Pandemic**

Today, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), along with The Promise of Justice Initiative, Southern Center for Human Rights, Mississippi Center for Justice, SPLC Action Fund, Roderick and Solange MacArthur Justice Center, Forward Justice, ACLU of South Carolina, and Arkansas Civil Liberties Union, issued a [Demand for Immediate Action](#) for Southern government officials to implement desperately needed protections against COVID-19 infection and deaths in correctional and juvenile facilities throughout the South, which disproportionately incarcerate Black individuals. With poor health outcomes, inadequate access to health care, and elevated poverty rates, the South, which incarcerates a larger portion of its population than any other region in the nation, is exceptionally vulnerable to a widespread outbreak of COVID-19 in its facilities. The document lists four critical steps Southern officials must take to protect the health and safety of incarcerated people, as well as corrections staff, from viral outbreaks and deaths within these facilities.

“Our demands are premised on the fact that the Constitution and our moral and legal obligations to protect the population from the devastation of this pandemic extends to those held in our nation’s prisons. To date, we have seen no comprehensive effort to respond to the potential for catastrophic harm from COVID-19 infection among the population of people who are held and who work in prison,” said LDF President and Director-Counsel [Sherrilyn Ifill](#). “Without these crucial protections, COVID-19 outbreaks within correctional facilities across the South are on the rise. We need clear and aggressive action by state and local officials to create and implement protocols that will protect against infection, especially for those most vulnerable, and provide effective health care to those infected by this deadly virus.”

President and CEO of the Mississippi Center for Justice Vangela M. Wade stated, “Mississippi has one of the [highest uninsured rates](#) in the country, our citizens have sky-high rates of COVID-19 risk factors, we now have the nation’s [highest COVID-19 hospitalization rate](#), and the number of Black Mississippians who have died from the virus is 90% higher than would be expected based on the racial makeup of our state population ([72% of deaths versus 38% of population](#)); these are the Mississippians who work and live in our

jails and in our overcrowded, understaffed, underfunded, prison system—currently under federal investigation for [failure to protect from harm](#)—and they cannot wait any longer for Mississippi officials to act decisively to prevent unnecessary loss of life.”

Our demands for immediate action for Southern officials are as follows:

- 1) Release certain categories of the incarcerated population who are vulnerable to the virus and/or do not pose significant and imminent danger to the community.
- 2) Take precautionary measures to protect the health of incarcerated people that are in compliance with established federal guidelines.
- 3) Provide incarcerated people with access to appropriate medical care in medically appropriate settings.
- 4) Make transparent public disclosures about the COVID-19 pandemic in all correctional and juvenile facilities, including any racial disparities.

Black people are incarcerated in state prisons across the country at more than five times the rate of their white counterparts. Moreover, Black people make up more than one-half of the prison population in twelve states, including Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia. Due to pervasive health disparities, Black people, including incarcerated Black people, are more likely to suffer from medical conditions like diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure, obesity, and heart disease that increase the severity and mortality of COVID-19 infection. Yet, prisons, jails, and juvenile facilities are currently failing to adhere to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s guidelines to protect against COVID-19, which makes incarcerated individuals extremely vulnerable to infection. Southern state and local governments must act immediately to prevent a public health and human rights catastrophe that will disproportionately harm Black people and other vulnerable and marginalized communities.

Read the Demand for Immediate Action [here](#).

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*Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation’s first civil and human rights law organization. LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.*

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