



CRIME SURVIVORS FOR SAFETY AND JUSTICE

Office of Governor Ron DeSantis
State of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

March 26, 2020

Dear Governor DeSantis,

Thank you for the work you're doing to keep us all safe from COVID-19. Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice (CSSJ) advocates for policies that promote healing over retribution. As survivors of crime, we ask that you continue to provide access to and support for services we need to be safe, and that you not justify unnecessary incarceration on our behalf.

There are two clear steps that federal government and state leaders must take to stop the spread of COVID: rapidly expand the capacity of organizations providing critical assistance services for vulnerable communities and reduce unnecessary incarceration. The stronger the community, the more equipped it is to stop the spread. The following steps are needed immediately:

Expand the Capacity of Organizations providing critical assistance services for vulnerable communities:

A big part of healing for us is having access to services that meet our needs, many of which are related to the trauma we experienced as survivors of crime. Domestic violence shelters, trauma recovery and reentry centers, nonprofit community and faith-based services are all examples of essential, critical services that we need to be safe.

We affirm deeming critical health and safety functions as essential services and equipping these services with capacity to safely work. We recommend in particular:

- **Immediately expand emergency shelter options** for people without safety, including, domestic violence victims, gun violence survivors and reentry housing for people exiting the justice system without shelter.

- **Ensure critical assistance services are deemed essential services** such as domestic violence shelters, trauma recovery centers, violence prevention, reentry services, nonprofit and faith-based services and other critical supports that can help reduce exposure risks and get people to safety; sustain existing government contracts for these services to ensure that these resources can continue to exist.
- **Establish a one-billion-dollar Crisis Assistance Emergency Response Fund** to ensure these essential services are equipped to safely provide support and have capacity to expand access as the number of people in crisis grows.
- **Accelerate application reviews and reduce bureaucratic barriers** to victim compensation, public benefits (SNAP, TANF, WIC) and emergency housing or other crisis support so vulnerable people don't face delays to assistance in getting to safety.
- **Ensure critical community services can move online** and ensure the people they serve can access virtual help by providing technology equipment to providers and expanding free or low-cost broadband and mobile phone and data services so people can access crisis assistance and safely shelter in place.
- **Establish or expand crisis assistance navigator hotlines** and tele-wellness checks to connect vulnerable people to care.
- **Eliminate rules that prevent people with past convictions from eligibility** for federal and state housing, victim compensation and employment to facilitate access to safe shelter and reduced exposure.

Safely and Responsibly Reduce Unnecessary Incarceration

Second, as survivors, we know that many people in prison were once victims of crime themselves, and we believe in healing over retribution. We affirm calls to action emerging across the nation to take urgent action to stop the spread of the virus inside prisons and jails. (See [REFORM Alliance SAFER Plan](#), [The Justice Collaborative COVID-19 Response](#), and [Prison Policy Initiative Virus Response](#).)

- **Accelerate testing and release of people in prison**, with reentry plans that include health access and shelter, especially for the elderly, sick, people who pose no risk and people that will be released soon anyway, with limited time remaining on their sentence.
- **Authorize and expand non-incarceration options** for people entering jail for low-level crime, pretrial detention, cases that do not involve a safety risk, and cases that usually result in short incarceration terms.
- **Prevent people on probation or parole from unnecessary incarceration** and exposure by terminating probation or parole supervision for people that have been compliant and are a low risk to recidivate; stopping returning people on probation or parole to incarceration for technical violations; shifting from in-person supervision to remote reporting, and ceasing penalties for violations of probation or parole that are dependent on financial stability.

As crime victims who support more rehabilitation and less incarceration, and who want us all to be safe, we strongly urge you to follow our recommendations above.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aswad Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'A'.

Aswad Thomas, MSW
Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice