

U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on the Judiciary

Washington, DC 20515-6216

One Hundred Sixteenth Congress

March 12, 2020

The Honorable William P. Barr
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Barr:

This week, the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus (or COVID-19) a global pandemic. Reports indicate that the virus has infected at least 125,000 people worldwide and has led to over 4,300 deaths to date. I write to inquire about the measures taken by the Department of Justice to ensure the health and welfare of prisoners in the custody of the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) and the U.S. Marshals Service (USMS) during this crisis. I write also to inquire about measures taken to ensure the health and welfare of staff and correctional officers who assist in housing and transporting prisoners in the custody of the BOP and the USMS.

I am especially concerned because the incarcerated and justice-involved populations contain a number of groups that may be particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. In particular, health conditions that make respiratory diseases more dangerous are far more common in the incarcerated population than in the general U.S. population.

I also believe it would be important, at this time, for DOJ to consider measures that can be taken to reduce the number of prisoners in government custody. Specifically, I believe DOJ should consider directing U.S. Attorney's Offices, wherever possible, to not seek the detention of individuals at their initial appearance in court, decline prosecuting minor, non-violent offenses, and decline pursuing supervised release and probation revocations that involve technical and minor violations.

Because of my concerns about these serious issues, I ask the following:

1. Has the Justice Department given any direction or guidance to the BOP and the USMS for dealing with COVID-19? If so, please provide the specific text of the guidance provided.
2. Whether in response to direction or guidance from DOJ or not, have the BOP and the USMS developed their own policies and procedures regarding COVID-19? Please provide copies of any and all such policies and procedures.
 - a. If so, have these policies and procedures been distributed to each facility, including contract facilities?

b. What specific measures have been taken to ensure that these policies and procedures are being implemented in contract facilities that are not BOP-run?

i. If these policies and procedures are not being implemented in contract facilities, please explain why not and what, if any, alternative measures are being taken to ensure the health and welfare of inmates who are incarcerated in those contract facilities.

3. Have the BOP and the USMS, respectively, designated point persons within their agencies to address COVID-19? Please provide the name and title of each person so designated and their qualifications for the position.

4. Have additional precautionary measures been taken with respect to sanitation and hygiene, including frequent cleaning and ready availability of soap and tissues?

5. Is there a comprehensive testing protocol being implemented across the board in BOP facilities and contract facilities? If not, why not?

6. Are inmates entering BOP and contract facilities being tested at the time of intake? If not, why not? Conversely, are inmates being tested at the time of their release from BOP or contract facilities?

7. At this time, are any prisoners in the custody of BOP and the USMS being monitored for signs of infection?

8. Are testing kits being made available to the BOP and contract facilities? If so, how quickly are test results being released?

9. What measures have been taken to ensure that any prisoners testing positive for COVID-19 are isolated and treated? What about those who have exposed to those who test positive?

10. What protocols exist, once a positive case is discovered, to ensure that the rest of the prisoners in the facility are not exposed? Are any special measures being taken to ensure high-risk prisoners are not exposed?

11. What is the protocol for deciding when to transport a prisoner with COVID-19 for care at a hospital?

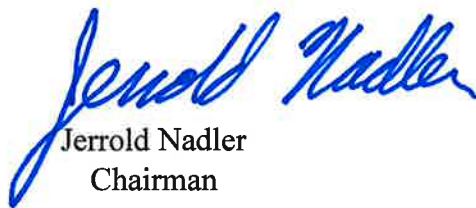
12. What protocols exist with regards to attorney and family visits? How are attorneys and family members being notified if a client or family member, respectively, tests positive for COVID-19?

13. What is the protocol for transporting inmates to court for hearings?

14. Are specific measures being taken to ensure staff at the facilities (whether BOP-run or contract facilities) have leave available if they develop symptoms of COVID-19? Are special measures being taken to ensure staffing levels are adequate at all times?

Because of the urgency of this matter, I ask that you respond in writing as soon as possible,

Sincerely,



Handwritten signature of Jerrold Nadler in blue ink.

Jerrold Nadler
Chairman

cc: Jim Jordan
Ranking Member