

## STATEMENT OF LANI GRAHAM, MD MPH

As a physician and expert in public health, I write to ask the Court to give serious consideration to taking immediate action to address the challenges posed by jails and prison as Maine struggles to control the COVID-19 virus. We cannot protect our community unless we protect *all* members and look closely at all settings. At times like this with so many challenges before us, it is all too easy to turn our backs on those who are incarcerated and “hope for the best”. This would be a serious mistake and can only result in more misery. We health professionals must depend on you to develop solutions that take into account what we already know about the dangers posed by correctional facilities and how that spills over into Maine communities. As you weigh these options, I ask you to consider the following medical facts:

- COVID-19 has already shown us in multiple settings that prisons and jails are where the worst outbreaks occur—South Korea, our model of a good public health approach, had its worst outbreak in a prison hospital (107 infected and 7 died). And many states are seeing how impossible it is to contain this virus in a prison setting—New York and Massachusetts.
- Large numbers of inmates in all United States prisons, including Maine, are ill with mental health problems or substance use disorders. Must they be kept from treatment *and* infected with a lethal virus?

- Inmates, of course, present a high risk to those caring for them—the staff, both medical and non-medical. These folks go in and out of facilities, perhaps taking the virus home to vulnerable family and their community at large. I understand that in some places in Maine where the virus has a foothold, significant percentages of staff are already ill.
- We must protect health professionals who are working the front lines in this conflict. They do not need an influx of ill inmates to add to their burden.

It is crucial to reduce as much as possible the number of inmates in Maine jails and prisons, enabling people to perform social distancing and to access healthcare resources in the community. In this our 200<sup>th</sup> year, let's lead the nation in good sense and creativity as we face together this terrible pandemic.

Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to contact me if you think I can help.

Sincerely,

Lani Graham, MD MPH

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