

UPDATE ON COVID in Jails and Prisons

Disability Rights Washington AVID (Amplifying Voices of Inmates with Disabilities)

We have shifted gears and dedicated at least half of our staff (currently 4 people) to working on COVID-related work.

Prisons: As of this morning, there are three incarcerated individuals in Washington State prisons (all at Monroe Correctional Complex) who have tested positive for COVID-19. There is a lot of information about what Department of Corrections is doing in response to COVID on this website: <https://www.doc.wa.gov/news/covid-19.htm> (including how prisons are attempting to socially distance, isolate, and quarantine people). AVID has been very active in pushing DOC to take preventive measures and push for the safe release of people who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 and those who are nearing the ends of their sentences. Because prisons are so crowded and people live in such close quarters, we are very concerned that a big outbreak is inevitable. Most recently we worked with the ACLU to ask the Governor to sign an executive order that we drafted (<https://action.aclu.org/send-message/wa-keep-prisons-safe-covid19?fbclid=IwAR3-61QdEP1DdpoD4GpilPjHouZz45uh6gxlG8GDSENMb-9rDoNhgfsdxg>). The Governor has not taken any action thus far to order release of any prisoners, but we are hoping to talk to his office this week. Columbia Legal Services has filed legal action in the WA Supreme Court to get people released from prison. Information about that case is here: <https://columbialegal.org/petitioners-submit-brief-in-case-against-wa-governor-and-doc-secretary-on-the-heels-of-the-first-confirmed-case-of-covid-19-by-a-person-in-prison/>. We will be filing a brief in support of that case next week. When we hear of issues related to COVID in prisons from incarcerated individuals, we have been reaching out to the Department of Corrections to try to improve conditions (usually related to quarantine/isolation).

If you want to share information about what we have been doing, this is the best place to keep updated: <https://www.disabilityrightswa.org/2020/03/30/call-for-action-to-stop-the-spread-of-covid-19-in-the-states-prisons-and-jails/>. Here is a video where Rachael recorded last week that explains what DRW has been working on related to prisons/jails: <https://www.tvw.org/watch/?eventID=2020041002>.

Jails: Jails have been doing much better at lowering their populations because it is much easier to do so. Most of jail populations have not been convicted of the crime they are being held for, so release is easier to obtain. Some big jails are down 20-50% in population. The person who was doing most of our jail work is unfortunately our sick, so I am not as up to date on specific jails. We sent letters to King and Spokane County Jails urging action. Both of them have reduced their populations considerably to try to allow most people have a cell by themselves.

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