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February 8, 2021

Dear Mayor Krewson, Public Safety Director Edwards, and Commissioner Glass,

I am reaching out with grave concerns regarding the most recent uprising on Saturday, February 6, 2021, at the St. Louis City Justice Center (CJC). Per comments made by city officials during a press briefing on Saturday, the uprising involving 117 people is the third such event at CJC since December. It comes as tensions flare within the jail over health risks due to jail conditions and the rapid spread of COVID-19. Further, many of the people detained at the Justice Center are still awaiting court dates and have not been convicted of any crimes. This presents serious concerns around efforts to mitigate the risk of an outbreak as people cycle in and out of these facilities each day.¹

This latest spate of unrest by people incarcerated at CJC comes amidst a raging pandemic that is making its way through our nation's prisons and jails, including those in Missouri. As of February 2, 2021, the Marshall Project had identified more than 372,583 infections and 2,359 deaths among people and staff in our federal, state, and local correctional facilities, including 5,369 cases and at least 42 deaths across Missouri's corrections system.² Prisons and jails are known as incubators for infectious disease outbreaks. With nearly 1 in 5 incarcerated people testing positive for COVID-19 in Missouri, the infection rate for the virus is nearly three times higher among Missouri's incarcerated population than the general population.³ Further, Missouri ranks in the top 20 of states for COVID-19 infections in prisons and jails. The outbreaks in our state and local corrections facilities have also led to infections among staff, with at least 2,522 cases and six deaths among Missouri's corrections staff.⁴

Contrary to the concerns raised by those detained at the Justice Center, Public Safety Director Jimmie Edwards, claimed that there were "zero COVID cases"⁵ at the jail during a press conference following the uprising. This news comes three weeks after comments by Commissioner Dale Glass, that on January 12, 2021 there were "30 active COVID-19 cases"⁶ between the Justice Center and the St. Louis Medium Security Institution. As of Saturday, no cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed or publicly reported among the 706 people detained at CJC;⁷ however, given how rapidly the virus spreads in our correction

¹ Prison Policy Initiative. Local Jails: The real scandal is the churn. 2020. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/pie2019_jail_churn.html

² The Marshall Project. A State-by-State Look at Coronavirus in Prisons. February 5, 2021.

<https://www.themarshallproject.org/2020/05/01/a-state-by-state-look-at-coronavirus-in-prisons>

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ KSDK News. "Watch live: Public Safety Director Jimmie Edwards to provide update on inmate uprising at St. Louis City Justice Center. February 6, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=506206230367570&ref=watch_permalink

⁶ Rachel Rice. St. Louis officials say 'surge' in virus cases occurred at city jail. St. Louis Post Dispatch; January 12, 2021.

https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/st-louis-officials-say-surge-in-virus-cases-occurred-at-city-jail/article_85f778bf-4136-51e2-a58c-f55614ab4364.html

⁷ Inmate Population By Day. St. Louis City Division of Corrections. February 6, 2021. <https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/data/dashboards/inmates/by-day.cfm>

systems, many of us in the St. Louis community, including family members of those being detained, have serious concerns about the city’s transparency regarding COVID-19 disclosure, conditions of the jails, and protocols related to those individuals who do become sick.

Moreover, communication shared by community members via social media noted some of the grievances and demands by the men held inside of CJC and reflects the deep concerns they have about their personal health and safety—issues they believe have gone ignored by city officials. In a post shared on Facebook,⁸ the accounting reports that showers are infrequent, visitation from loved ones has been denied, and personal protective equipment, regular temperature checks and testing for COVID-19 have not been readily available to those who are detained.⁹ The accounts also report that quarantine protocols for people who are sick or exhibiting symptoms related to COVID-19 do not follow recommendations provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),¹⁰ and that heating systems within the facility remains a constant problem particularly in these winter months.¹¹ As one first-person account indicated in the post,¹² which has since been shared over 500 times, “we don’t want to die from SARS COVID-19.”

As it stands, Missouri is not planning on vaccinating those incarcerated until the third phase of vaccination, despite a significantly higher risk of infection within our prisons and jails.¹³ Instead, the state has indicated it’s plans to vaccinate corrections staff, but will wait to vaccinate incarcerated individuals as some of the final people vaccinated in the state.¹⁴ Other states are providing incarcerated people with access to the vaccine to prevent uncontrollable spread of the virus that not only puts the lives of those incarcerated at risk, but further burdens an already stretched health care system.¹⁵

There are also concerns circling around retaliation against people who are incarcerated when complaints are made regarding jail conditions. In the aftermath of the disturbances in December and January, a number of people who had been detained at CJC were transferred to the Medium Security Institute (also known as the Workhouse) with stricter security measures or were put into segregation for days on end. During Saturday’s events, signs could be seen hanging outside of the fourth floor broken windows depicting concerns over the handling of those punished for the unrest, including pleas to “FREE 57,” an acknowledgment of the men who had been moved from CJC to the Workhouse in January. Attorneys at Arch City Defenders, a St. Louis-based legal advocacy organization, also corroborated these concerns based on grievances they’ve received through a special hotline¹⁶ regarding conditions at the City Justice Center and the Workhouse, including severe punishment involving the use of solitary confinement among individuals being held at CJC.

The severity of the events that have unfolded in recent weeks, in conjunction with a global pandemic that has rapidly spread across America’s prisons and jails, requires immediate attention. Our community needs

⁸ Expo St. Louis. Facebook post. February 6, 2021. https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=213009767221851&id=114693760386786

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Correctional & Detention Facilities. January 27, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/correction-detention/index.html>

¹¹ Expo St. Louis. Facebook post. February 6, 2021. https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=213009767221851&id=114693760386786

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Katie Rose Quandt. Incarcerated people and corrections staff should be prioritized in COVID-19 vaccination plans. Prison Policy Initiative. December 8, 2020. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2020/12/08/covid-vaccination-plans/>

¹⁴ Shahla Farzan. Missouri Prison Staff Offered COVID Vaccine Soon, But Most Inmates Have To Wait. St. Louis Public Radio. January 27, 2021. <https://news.stlpublicradio.org/coronavirus/2021-01-27/missouri-prison-staff-offered-covid-vaccine-soon-but-most-inmates-have-to-wait>

¹⁵ Katie Rose Quandt. Incarcerated people and corrections staff should be prioritized in COVID-19 vaccination plans. Prison Policy Initiative. December 8, 2020. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2020/12/08/covid-vaccination-plans/>

¹⁶ Justina Coronel. 'The riot was the wake up we needed' | Transparency and change demanded after City Justice Center revolt. KSDK. February 6, 2020. <https://www.ksdk.com/article/news/local/the-riot-was-the-wake-up-we-needed-transparency-and-change-demanded-after-st-louis-city-justice-center-revolt/63-e90a4cf7-dd8b-40e9-a936-9cab0fcc14c6>

the City to take steps to be more transparent regarding the conditions at its jails, current COVID-19 protocols, and ensure the safety and rights of those individuals being held in these facilities are protected.

As such, I am requesting the following information from the City of St. Louis:

1. Based on data available to the City, what were the COVID-19 testing, case rates, hospitalizations, and deaths among people detained at St. Louis City Justice Center and St. Louis Medium Security Institution as of Saturday, February 6th? What have those rates been since the start of the pandemic? Will you commit to publicly disclosing this data and updating it daily on the Division of Corrections website?
2. What public health information is being shared with incarcerated individuals, their families, and other visitors? How often are relevant updates being shared?
3. What is the protocol for providing personal protective equipment (PPE) and face masks to people detained at St. Louis City Justice Center and St. Louis Medium Security Institution? How much PPE and how many face masks are currently available? Is the use of such PPE in line with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention?
4. What is the current breakdown of pretrial and post-conviction offenses within both the St. Louis City Justice Center and St. Louis Medium Security Institution? Among both pretrial and post-conviction offenses, what is the current breakdown of the type of charge within both the St. Louis City Justice Center and St. Louis Medium Security Institution? Further, what was the average length of time in pretrial detention prior to the pandemic? What is the average length of time in pretrial detention as of today? If there has been an increase, what factors have contributed to it?
5. Based on funds appropriated by Congress in the CARES Act, the City of St. Louis received \$1,392,940¹⁷ through the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance. How specifically has the City utilized these funds to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in its jails?
6. What is the protocol for use of segregation or solitary confinement, including maximum and average lengths of stay in segregation at the St. Louis City Justice Center and St. Louis Medium Security Institution? What is the status of those individuals who have been held in segregation as a result of the uprisings on December 29, 2020, January 1, 2021, and February 6, 2021?
7. What is the status of those individuals who have been transferred from St. Louis City Justice Center to the St. Louis Medium Security Institution following the uprising on January 1, 2021?
8. As vaccines become available to incarcerated people in Missouri, what factors will guide vaccine distribution within the City's jails, and what are the City's plans for prioritizing the most vulnerable and achieving herd immunity among the local jail population?
9. How has the City prioritized or facilitated the release of individuals, particularly those who are pregnant, medically vulnerable, or elderly and who are awaiting trial at St. Louis City Justice Center and St. Louis Medium Security Institution?
10. What is the protocol for temperature settings within the facilities at St. Louis City Justice Center and St. Louis Medium Security Institution between the winter months of November-March, as well as during the summer months between June and September? Additionally, please provide daily logs of nighttime temperatures at St. Louis City Justice Center and St. Louis Medium Security Institution over the past two months.

As a pastor and a nurse, I believe that we must lead with compassion. Every person in our society deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. Whether a person is incarcerated or not, unhoused or not, suffering through substance use or not, has a disability or not, we all deserve to have our fundamental

¹⁷ Bureau of Justice Assistance. BJA FY 2020 Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding. Missouri. <https://bj.a.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xvckuh186/files/media/document/fy20-cesf-allocations-mo.pdf>

rights and civil liberties protected. It is our obligation as public officials to ensure equal justice and protection under the law for every person in our St. Louis community.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter and our shared mission to ensure the safety, health, and wellbeing of our community members, and to ensure that we are transparent and accountable to our entire community, especially as we work together to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Given the urgency of this situation, I kindly ask for a response to my inquiry no later than February 15, 2021.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cori Bush". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

CORI BUSH
Member of Congress