



April 2, 2020

Governor Mike DeWine
Director Amy Acton, Ohio Department of Health
Director Annette Chambers-Smith, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections
Director Ryan Gies, Ohio Department of Youth Services

Re: Reducing Incarcerated Populations Immediately Through a Trauma-Informed Approach

Dear Governor DeWine and Directors,

On behalf of the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence, we want to acknowledge your steadfast commitment to the reliance on data and community leaders to keep all Ohioans safe and healthy during this time. We are proud to operate as a statewide coalition in Ohio, where our leadership has set a bold example of collaborative dedication to the welfare of all.

We write to support the implementation of measures to reduce incarcerated populations in both local jails and lockdown facilities, and in state prisons and detention centers. We implore you, however, to do so through a trauma-informed approach. This approach should consider not only the health risks posed to the incarcerated population, but also the impact on survivors.

OAESV is dedicated to dismantling systems of oppression that impact survivors and all Ohioans. Oppression exists across our communities and legal systems. Incarceration impacts historically oppressed populations at a devastatingly greater rate than others. So, too, are the rates of sexual violence perpetrated against oppressed populations greater and availability and quality of resources available to oppressed survivors of sexual violence fewer. Women of color, persons with disabilities, non-English speaking Ohioans, and the LGBTQ community are subjected to sexual violence at rates far greater than others. CDC dataⁱ indicates that more than 20% of women of color have been raped, and are 2.5 times more likely to be murdered by men than White women. 64% of multicultural women are subjected to sexual violence. 1 in 4 men, and 2 in 5 women, who experience sexual violence have a disability. Because of their vulnerability to sexual exploitation and social isolation, and to the lack of culturally specific resources, Latina women are 10 times likely to be victim to sexual assault.ⁱⁱ Likewise, Transgender persons have a 300% higher risk than cisgender men. After oppressed persons experience sexual violence, they often have far fewer options in seeking assistance and safety in their time of need.

OAESV supports the release of inmates during the current public health crisis to keep all Ohioans as healthy as possible. However, we implore you and all of the decisionmakers involved to consider the impact of these measures and to take necessary corresponding steps immediately.

First, we propose that decision on whether to release an individual must be based upon not only on the individual's health status or their assessed risk to reoffend, but also upon the realistic risk to victims of their offense and impact on vulnerable survivors.

Whenever feasible, the voice of crime victims must be heard in release considerations. At a minimum, prosecutors, courts, and supervising authorities must make every effort to provide notice to crime victims and survivors of release decisions and of the conditions of release.

Prosecutors have a statutory duty under R.C. §2930 to provide these notices to victims. That responsibility is critical in these unique circumstances more than ever. Not only are release decisions being made at an expedited rate, but survivors are presently left without safety plans or options during social distancing and the stay-at-home order.

Any measures taken to reduce incarceration *must* coincide with an intentional increase in resources and funding for program and individuals that provide supervision of offenders, reentry initiatives, and offer guidance in housing, employment, and financial assistance to newly-released citizens. There must be an increase in support and funding for entities providing substance abuse and mental health services and for parole, probation, and other supervision authorities. The Recidivism rates of individuals with meaningful supports and effective supervision are far less than of those without. Congressional Research Service analyses show that the chance that an individual reoffends after release is drastically reduced by reentry initiatives that offer vocational training, substance abuse prevention, mental health services, and housing support.ⁱⁱⁱ

Finally, and foremost, these measures *must* be met with a significant increase in resources and funding for the support for survivors of sexual violence. Rape Crisis Centers, community advocates, and others that provide survivors assistance in safety planning, advocacy, and legal assistance absolutely must receive Ohio's support. Those that offer critical supports such as substance abuse counselors, therapists and medical professionals must be recognized. Professionals and volunteers with experience in supporting survivors through trauma-informed and anti-oppressive practices are those who will be working in the face of a pandemic to keep survivors safe. They must be acknowledged, funded, and supported.

We respectfully request that any measures taken to decrease the incarcerated population be anti-oppressive and trauma-informed. Measures must include a focus on the successful reentry and effective supervision of offenders and, above all, resources to ensure that the safety and health of survivors be prioritized and that their voices be amplified.

OAESV is ready to assist in any way we can. Please direct Ohioans to our expansive list [resources](#) for survivors seeking assistance in this time of uncertainty.

Respectfully,



Rosa Beltré, Executive Director
Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence