



March 25, 2020

Dear Governor Pritzker,

As one of the nation's largest criminal justice reform organizations, dedicated to serving survivors of crime, people living with past convictions, and organizations that serve these constituencies, the Alliance for Safety and Justice (ASJ) is writing today to thank you and your administration's leadership in taking bold and necessary actions to address the Covid-19 crisis. We are particularly grateful for your executive order that empowered the Illinois Department of Corrections to safely release people in its custody. This action is consistent with the work of advocates in Illinois and across the country, calling on their elected officials to responsibly release people in jails and prisons.

We also write to you to ask you for your continued support for the essential services that crime survivors and people living with criminal records go to for help. They are critical to supporting and protecting people in dire need.

Domestic violence shelters, trauma recovery and reentry centers, nonprofit community and faith-based services are all examples of essential, critical services that were *already* overburdened and triaging before the outbreak. Today, as a result of COVID-19, many of these essential crisis services are way over capacity due to increased need or facing breakdown because they lack technological resources to abide by shelter-at-home orders or to keep their workforce paid.

Hospitals are seeing increases in child abuse and domestic violence cases, brought on, they believe, by increased stressors of the circumstances of COVID-19. It is urgent that we also address the hidden crisis of COVID-19, where people who typically rely on support services for survival are at risk of losing the services they need to be safe. Trusted community services and people who need assistance to be safe cannot be overlooked.

We affirm your decision to deem critical health and safety functions as essential services and equipping these services with capacity to safely work.

We also recommend the following actions:

- **Continue to find ways to safely release people in the custody of the Illinois Department of Corrections**, including through the use of electronic or home detention and executive clemency
- **Immediately expand emergency shelter options** for people without safety, including, domestic violence victims, gun violence survivors and reentry housing for people exiting the justice system without shelter.
- **Accelerate application reviews and reduce bureaucratic barriers** to victim compensation, public benefits and emergency housing or other crisis support so vulnerable people don't face delays to assistance in getting to safety.

- **Ensure critical community services can move online** and ensure the people they serve can access virtual help by providing technology equipment to providers and expanding free or low-cost broadband and mobile phone and data services so people can access crisis assistance and safely shelter in place.
- **Establish or expand crisis assistance navigator hotlines** and tele-wellness checks to connect vulnerable people to care.
- **Eliminate rules that prevent people with past convictions from eligibility** for federal and state housing, victim compensation and employment to facilitate access to safe shelter and reduced exposure.

Importantly, the organizations that provide support to survivors of crime or people living with criminal convictions are not only essential now, but will continue to be essential as we absorb the collective impact of COVID-19 in our communities and work to rebuild together.

Sincerely,



Robert Rooks
Vice-President
Alliance for Safety and Justice