



June 24, 2020

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Governor Gavin Newsom  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: COVID-19 Infection Crisis at San Quentin State Prison**

Dear Governor Newsom,

On behalf of the Marin County Board of Supervisors, I write regarding the growing crisis at San Quentin State Prison. As the COVID-19 outbreak there enters its fourth week, with nearly 500 cases, this letter outlines the steps taken by Marin County Public Health and the challenges experienced in supporting the facility and managing this crisis. We ask for your assistance at this time. The most acute needs are the following:

- 1) The establishment of on-site capacity to manage the care of inmates sickened with COVID-19; and
- 2) The establishment of an Incident Commander at the facility with outbreak management expertise, to lead a facility wide response for both inmates and staff, and encompassing infection prevention, contact investigation, testing, isolation/quarantine, and medical care.

San Quentin State Prison lies within Marin County and is managed by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). Marin County Public Health (MCPH) does not have jurisdiction over this facility, and assistance is offered at the request of the facility. In this outbreak MCPH has been asked to provide guidance for consideration by facility leadership. Marin Health Medical Center, located in nearby Greenbrae, has a contractual agreement with San Quentin to provide healthcare for certain inmates who require hospitalization.

On June 1, 2020 MCPH was notified by CDCR that 122 inmates had been transferred from the Chino Institution for Men (CIM) in Southern California to San Quentin State Prison. CIM was experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak and the transfer was an effort to reduce the population in that facility. In our role providing guidance to CDCR, MCPH participated in two meetings with facility leadership within the three days after this transfer.

The transferred inmates had not been tested for COVID-19 within 14 days prior to arrival at San Quentin. Recognizing that some would be infected through exposure at CIM, MCPH recommended testing all transferred inmates, and sequestering them completely from the native San Quentin population. Instead, transferred inmates were tested and placed in a large shared unit with existing San Quentin inmates prior to the return of testing results.

Because this decision placed all inmates and staff working in that unit at risk, MCPH recommended a policy of mandatory mask wearing, and preventing staff who had been exposed in that unit from working in other units. MCPH was informed by CDCR

that local health officers lack the authority to mandate measures in state-run prisons.

Lacking the authority to ensure standard outbreak management, and seeing the consequences of decisions made thus far, on June 3, 2020 MCPH recommended San Quentin leadership establish an incident commander with expertise in outbreak management at the facility. This has not occurred, and a lack of decision-making authority by subject matter experts has led to fundamental gaps in critical domains of outbreak response.

Currently, the plan for the healthcare of critically ill inmates is transfer one by one to regional hospitals, and hospitals are now indicating they can no longer accept San Quentin COVID-19 transfers. This is especially concerning given MCPH's persistent request for such a plan going back to March when we anticipated the possibility of a large outbreak.

The Marin County Public Health Officer raised this concern in a call with Congressman Jared Huffman, State Senator Mike McGuire, and Assembly Member Mark Levine in early May. Assembly Member Levine elevated this concern to your office and issued a press release on May 14 highlighting the unmet need for a prison-specific plan for managing a COVID-19 outbreak.

We respectfully urge your direct intervention on this issue of health equity for inmates, and increasing concern to the County of Marin and its residents.

Respectfully Submitted,



Katie Rice, President  
Marin County Board of Supervisors

Cc: Marin County Board of Supervisors  
Senator Mike McGuire  
Assembly Member Marc Levine  
Ralph M. Diaz, Secretary, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation  
Dr. Sonia Y. Angell, Director, California Department of Public Health  
Dr. Matthew Willis, Marin County Public Health Officer