

March 19, 2020

Dear Sheriff,

We are writing to suggest measures to protect the safety of the men, women and kids in your custody. We ask that you:

- 1- Waive all costs for soap and other hygiene products from the commissary or canteen;
- 2- Establish secure, unmonitored phone lines upon which individuals can communicate freely with attorneys on both civil and criminal matters; and
- 3- Ensure unfettered access to telephones for incarcerated people to communicate with their loved ones.



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Alanah Odoms Hebert
Executive Director

First, we are requesting that you waive commissary prices for anti-bacterial soap and all other personal hygiene products for a period of 60 days to aid in mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in your facility. We also request, if possible, that you follow suit with the Ohio Department of Corrections who is making hand sanitizer available to incarcerated people as well as staff.¹ In these turbulent times, incarcerated people are powerless to take any measure to control their own healthcare and safety. Instead they are entirely reliant upon correctional facilities to provide for their sanitation and healthcare.

In crowded prisons and jails, “social distancing” is nearly impossible. Incarcerated people live in very close quarters, and share showers, toilets, sinks, eating and living areas. These facilities are the perfect environment for the rampant spread of infectious disease.² Jails and prisons thus have a heightened responsibility to undertake all possible measures to increase and maintain sanitary conditions for incarcerated people in these facilities.

As you know, many people in jails and prisons do not have funds to purchase even basic hygiene necessities such as soap. At this time of global financial instability, many family members will also have an increased struggle to put funds into commissary accounts or pay the processing fees for commissary contributions. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that visitation for most facilities within the state has been suspended, further limiting the possibility for families to contribute funds to their loved ones within these facilities.³

¹ <https://www.correctionsone.com/products/infection-control/articles/ohio-prisons-preparing-for-possible-coronavirus-outbreak-RRbC91ddzO55ak3j/>

² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lipiroy/2020/03/11/infections-and-incarceration-why-jails-and-prisons-need-to-prepare-for-covid-19-stat/#f102f8049f31>

³ <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/DOC-Suspends-Visitation-at-State-Run-Prisons.html?soid=1125804998217&aid=trvGed3kRWA>



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The price of a bar of soap varies across facilities,⁴ ranging from \$.97⁵ to \$1.88.⁶ While a minimal price for most, it is one that could render basic hygiene unavailable for countless incarcerated people across the state. The waiver of such prices and the provision of adequate soap supplies to each incarcerated person could mean the difference of lives saved when the virus reaches these facilities. We call upon you educate the folks in your custody about the importance of hygiene right now, and provide sanitation supplies for handwashing and cleaning free of cost. The lives of your staff also depend upon it.

Second, we hope that your jurisdiction will invest in secure, unmonitored phone lines to allow incarcerated individuals to speak with lawyers via phone. In-person visitation has been suspended in many jails, and lawyers may be unable to visit jails at this time due to health concerns in their families. We must work together to bridge the communication gap between incarcerated people and lawyers in this time of crisis, to ensure that individuals in your custody still are able to access the courts. Some prison phone companies will allow you to set up unmonitored lines. However you logistically do it, we urge you to set up confidential calls as soon as you can, to help contain the spread of this virus while also ensuring constitutional access to counsel and courts. This same reasoning goes for ensuring individuals can contact their families, who they may not be able to see in person presently due to quarantine.

We know you are in the midst of responding to this grave threat to public safety, with the solemn responsibility to ensure the safety of your staff and the people in your custody. We thank you for taking this obligation seriously and for the work you are doing in this difficult time. We want to support you in preserving the safety of everyone at your facility, and hope that you will consider our requests in furtherance of these shared goals.

Sincerely,

Katie Schwartzmann \ MS

Katie Schwartzmann
Legal Director
ACLU of Louisiana

⁴ Tiger Commissary is the commissary provider for several facilities in Louisiana, their prices for dial soap vary across the state. In Assumption Parish Jail, a bar of dial soap costs \$1.44, in Evangeline Parish jail a bar of dial soap costs \$1.51, in Jefferson Davis Parish Jail a bar of dial soap costs \$1.39, at Morgan City PD a bar of dial soap costs \$1.58, in Orleans Parish Jail a bar of dial soap costs \$1.38, at Red River Detention Center a bar of dial soap costs \$1.41, in Sabine Parish Detention Center a bar of dial soap costs \$1.08, at Union Parish Detention center a bar of dial soap costs \$1.35, at Ville Platte Police Department a bar of dial soap costs \$1.42, at West Feliciana Parish Detention Center a bar of dial soap costs \$1.34, at Winn Parish Detention Center a bar of dial soap costs \$1.41.

<https://orders.tigercommissary.com/services/SelectFacility.aspx?stateAbbr=la&stateName=Louisiana>

⁵ Commissary price from Dixon Correctional Institute for dial soap is \$0.97.

⁶ Commissary price from River Bend Detention Center for dial soap is \$1.88.