

WASHINGTON



FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE

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Honorable Governor Jay Inslee,

Your recent order to release and commute the sentences of over 1000 inmates with nonviolent, nonsexual in nature, or not serious offenses has raised merited concerns from some in the public safety sector.

The Washington State Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) represents a diverse body of public safety professionals that includes, police officers, correctional officers and several other executive branch agency law enforcement officers as well. It is the concern of the FOP that, given the current pandemic crisis, the early release of inmates may subject them to more risks and less stability than if they had remained incarcerated – as a result, the likelihood of recidivism increases. During incarceration inmates have stable housing, food resources and medical care. Sentence commutation of some prisoners in the COVID-19 context when housing, food accessibility, familial/support group interaction and medical services are limited and over-burdened has consequences (intended or unintended) to those prisoners and puts into question the compassion of the decision. In sum, our members want all folks exiting prison to be successful – we fear that the lack of planning and resources of those prisoners being released under your proclamation may result in just the opposite.

For this and any future early release of prisoners, we would respectfully ask that you consider the following principles.

- a) Prioritize public safety above all else - notification of victims and ensuring that the appropriate protective orders are in place is paramount.
- b) Communicate with local law enforcement agencies on a regular basis about the release of inmates into their communities. Law enforcement is currently stressed on keeping their workforce healthy as well as protecting their communities from the criminal opportunities that the stay at home order exposes. Adding recently released inmates to this environment only further complicates the work that these officers do.
- c) Ensure that violations of parole are properly enforced. Currently, to monitor capacity levels many of those that violate parole are not being taken back into custody. We ask that the Department of Corrections develop a plan for these specific released offenders and how to enforce their parole orders specifically.

- d) Consider the prisoners social environment and community support services of which the prisoner will be dependent upon. Housing stability, food banks, medical services and job security systems are incredibly taxed right now and any additional weight furthers their fragility.

- e) Set the released prisoners up for success. This includes having a release plan that reflects the stay at home order. The Department of Corrections is funded for these prisoners for the extent of their incarceration and those funds (that will not be needed for incarceration purposes) should be invested in ensuring an appropriate release plan and monitoring of these prisoners occurs. We ask the Governor's Office and organizations like the Association of Washington Businesses (AWB), Workforce and WorkSource Central to encourage employers that are hiring during the pandemic to consider these recently released prisoners as potential employees as much as they consider anyone else looking for steady employment at this time.

The FOP appreciates the Office of Governor Inslee for keeping communication open on this issue and engaging with our members as well as the Washington State Sentencing Taskforce. We welcome opportunities to work with our state's elected leaders, public officials and business leaders on responsible public safety decisions at this time.

Respectfully,



Lynnette Buffington, Executive Director

CC: Secretary of the Department of Corrections: Sinclair, Stephen (DOC) sdsinclair@doc1.wa.gov