



*The Honourable Kim Pate, C.M. | L'honorable Kim Pate, C.M.
Senator for Ontario | Sénatrice pour l'Ontario*

Statement from Senator Kim Pate on COVID-19 Measures in Federal Prisons

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OTTAWA, FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2020—As institutions across the country, from public schools to government bodies, adjust to the realities of COVID-19, it is vital that those who are most vulnerable not be left behind. We owe a particular duty to those who are institutionalized, including those in prisons.

Risk-based, security-focused approaches have led to a well-documented lack of access to adequate health care in prisons. In the context of COVID-19, keeping individuals locked down in close confinement will provide conditions of confinement ripe for the virus to flourish and spread. It also risks overburdening already stretched health care systems and means prisoners may go without adequate treatment, which will in turn create and increase risks for prisoners, especially the significant number who are of advanced age and/or living with chronic, underlying health conditions.

A public-health-centred action plan is vital. This includes monitoring cases of COVID-19 in prisons, monitoring access to basic health necessities, and monitoring use of lockdowns or other methods of isolation. This is imperative given the significant and permanent harms to physical and mental health associated with solitary confinement.

Addressing COVID-19 also requires measures to reduce the population within prisons. This can be achieved in ways that will not affect public safety. For instance, those who are already minimum security could be provided with accelerated access to conditional release. In addition, correctional authorities could make use of existing means of discretionary release. In particular, the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* allows for individuals to be transferred to community health centres for treatment. It also allows individuals to be transferred to Indigenous communities to serve their sentences. Measures such as temporary absences, compassionate releases and work releases could likewise be prioritized in order to allow individuals to support their families and communities. Those willing to volunteer for construction projects associated with the provision of housing, as well as temporary shelter or health care could be provided with supervised group work release opportunities.

The inadequacy of existing infrastructure has been raised by many. Another potential benefit to reducing the prison population, could be the freeing up of existing institutions to be repurposed to provide much-needed testing health centres.

As we work together to address this pandemic, all of us stand to benefit from ensuring that all Canadians can take measures to protect the health of themselves, as well as members of their families and communities.

- 30 -

For more information:

Emily Grant

Office of Senator Kim Pate

emily.grant@sen.parl.gc.ca

Tel: 613-355-6574