

Council For The National Interest

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Hon Mark McGowan BA, LLB MLA
Premier of Western Australia
5th floor, Dumas House
2 Havelock Street, West Perth 6005



Dear Premier McGowan

I write to raise the matter of what can be done to prevent a serious and deadly crisis in the event of the COVID-19 virus entering the State's prison system. Firstly, however, I wish to commend you and thank you personally and your team for the outstanding way in which you have all worked to protect all Western Australians from the spread of this virus.

As you know, prisons in Western Australia are overcrowded with doubling up in many cells. A significant percentage of inmates are vulnerable because they have serious illnesses- respiratory and other- that weaken the person's immune system. When the inevitable occurs, it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to isolate or quarantine inmates who exhibit symptoms or are actually diagnosed with COVID-19. To isolate a prisoner in a tiny prison cell for 14 days or more would be inhumane.

The spread of the virus would be so rapid that it would pose a serious risk to all prison staff and their families and others as the staff come and go daily. The cessation of prison visits is a small measure but this separation of prisoners and their loved ones has negative mental health effects on both.

The Australian Newspaper, today reports that more than 66 inmates of NSW jails have been placed in isolation amid fears they have contracted the virus, with authorities conceding it was "inevitable" the disease would hit the prison system.

CNI asks please, that you now put in place measures to immediately release all prisoners who have not been convicted or charged with a violent offence and assessed to be a low-risk prisoner judged not to be a danger to the community, who are rehabilitated and have a record of good behaviour whilst in custody and who have safe accommodation and support upon release.

They could be released on parole with their individual cases to be reviewed once the crisis passes.

This is not a party political matter but a 'whole of government' concern. I have therefore sent a copy of this letter to other party leaders encouraging them and their parties to support you in agreeing to release the 'eligible' prisoners. Once a significant cohort has been released, there will be much more space, to isolate others as necessary.

Kind Regards



Graeme Wishart - Chairman