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ACLU of Wisconsin: Comment on Supreme Court denial of petition

Posted on Friday, Apr 24, 2020

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MILWAUKEE – The Wisconsin Supreme Court today denied a petition seeking the release of elderly and vulnerable people from state prisons.

Laurence J. Dupuis, Legal Director at the ACLU of Wisconsin made this statement:

“We are very disappointed that the Wisconsin Supreme Court has joined Governor Evers and Secretary Carr in failing to recognize the urgency of getting vulnerable people out of harm’s way before the coronavirus pandemic. The virus already has a foothold in Wisconsin’s prisons, and the outbreak in Milwaukee’s House of Corrections shows how rapidly the virus spreads in jail and prison environments.

“Despite the fact that the virus is spreading and despite the fact that the Wisconsin Department of Health Services has stated that testing of incarcerated people should be a priority, the DOC has only tested 118 people in its care. In the massive Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility, the DOC has only tested 5 people, despite the fact that 3 of those 5 tested positive.

“If the DOC continues to bury its head in the sand, we fear that may lead to bodies being buried in the near future. As the ACLU study released this week shows, outbreaks in jails and prisons threaten entire communities. This is an imminent threat to public health that is too dangerous to ignore. We will continue to press Governor Evers and state officials to use their power to save lives and stop the spread of this deadly disease.”

Earlier this week, a new data model showed that COVID-19 could claim the lives of approximately 100,000 more people nationwide than current projections stipulate if jail populations are not dramatically and immediately reduced.