

ACLU of Wisconsin: Files open records request for Wisconsin DOC to require disclosure of serious COVID-19 illness and death in state prison system

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MILWAUKEE — The American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin on Friday requested that the Wisconsin Departments of Corrections provide information about the number of incarcerated people who have been hospitalized or died due to the COVID-19 outbreak in the state's prisons.

The ACLU of Wisconsin's requests follow news reports last week that two inmates in the Dodge Correctional Institution had died from complications of COVID-19 in mid-September. These deaths had not previously been disclosed by the DOC.

The Wisconsin DOC reports on its website that 2,523 people held in its prisons have tested positive for COVID-19, with 1,104 currently active cases. More than 3,100 prisoners are currently being kept in either quarantine or isolation, and 530 DOC staff have tested positive. However, the DOC does not disclose how many of those cases have required hospitalization or have resulted in death.

The ACLU of Wisconsin is seeking records that will disclose that important information about serious illness and death in the prisons. The requests also asks the state to explain:

- how it is quarantining and isolating people exposed to the virus
- the availability of masks for prisoners

- when and how a person who is incarcerated will be tested for COVID-19
- whether guards and other prison employees are screened for the virus before entering a prison

“The people of the Wisconsin are entitled to understand what additional burdens are being placed on our hospital systems as a result of the failure by Governor Evers and Secretary Carr to take serious actions to reduce the populations in Wisconsin prisons and to release the elderly and medically vulnerable who are most at risk,” said Chris Ott, Executive Director of the ACLU of Wisconsin. “Since the governor’s emergency declaration in March, we have been urging the state to act, and now we are seeing the consequences of not acting.”