

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 23, 2020

Attorney General Bill Barr
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Barr:

As you lead the Department of Justice (DOJ) during the COVID-19 pandemic, we ask that you continue your focus on the needs of law enforcement and other first responders who are among those serving on the front lines of this crisis to keep our communities safe. In the CARES Act, Congress provided federal, state, and local law enforcement with critical resources to respond to the crisis. The CARES Act also provided DOJ with new tools to address the impact of this crisis on the Bureau of Prisons (BOP), including new emergency authority to adjust prison populations by increasing the use of home confinement and expanding the use of video and telephone conferencing. We understand that BOP is responding to address the impact of COVID-19 on correctional officers and inmates, and DOJ is using its authorities to allow for individualized releases at specific facilities and for specific inmates, bearing in mind an inmate's specific health and criminal history, risk assessment, rehabilitative efforts, and outside support. We appreciate your commitment to public safety during this difficult time, and believe the federal government can provide critical leadership on these issues for state and local governments.

Nevertheless, some are attempting to use the COVID-19 pandemic to advance their political agenda by calling for a moratorium on the arrest and incarceration of certain criminals or by encouraging the release of many violent offenders who are serving lawful sentences in federal and state jails and prisons, without fully taking into account the potential public safety ramifications of such actions on communities grappling with this national public health emergency. We have serious concerns about the release of potentially dangerous individuals into communities during a declared national emergency and at a time when law enforcement must remain focused on preventing increased criminal activity arising from this crisis, such as cybercrime, scams, fraud, and domestic violence. Federal, state, and local law enforcement officials and probation officers face significant manpower and equipment shortages related to current public health conditions, and therefore our communities lack the adequate resources to supervise a drastically increased number of criminal offenders to ensure that they are able to successfully re-enter their communities without committing additional crimes. During this challenging situation, citizens and law enforcement must focus on responding to the threat COVID-19 poses to their families, communities, and livelihoods—not the increased burdens imposed by large-scale early releases of violent criminals from our prisons and jails.

We commend you on your efforts to protect public safety during this national emergency, and ask that you continue providing leadership as federal, state, and local law enforcement officials

balance their responsibility to ensure safety and dignity in our criminal justice system, while protecting law-abiding citizens from criminal activity.

Sincerely,



JOHN CORNYN
United States Senator

/s/

MITCH McCONNELL
Senate Majority Leader

/s/

LINDSEY GRAHAM
Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman

/s/

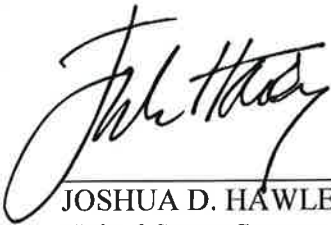
JOHN THUNE
United States Senator



TED CRUZ
United States Senator

/s/

BEN SASSE
United States Senator



JOSHUA D. HAWLEY
United States Senator



JONI K. ERNST
United States Senator

/s/

MARSHA BLACKBURN
United States Senator

/s/

TOM COTTON
United States Senator



PAT TOOMEY
United States Senator

/s/

ROY BLUNT
United States Senator

/s/

KELLY LOEFFLER
United States Senator

/s/

MIKE BRAUN
United States Senator

/s/

KEVIN CRAMER
United States Senator



DEB FISCHER
United States Senator

/s/

DAVID PERDUE
United States Senator

/s/

JOHN BARRASSO
United States Senator

/s/

SHELLY CAPITO
United States Senator

/s/

RICK SCOTT
United States Senator

/s/

JAMES INHOFE
United States Senator

/s/

M. MICHAEL ROUNDS
United States Senator

/s/

PAT ROBERTS
United States Senator



RON JOHNSON
United States Senator

/s/

JOHN HOEVEN
United States Senator

/s/

BILL CASSIDY
United States Senator

/s/

JOHN KENNEDY
United States Senator

/s/

STEVEN DAINES
United States Senator