

LOCAL GROUPS CALL ON DC LAW ENFORCEMENT TO HALT NONVIOLENT ARRESTS, LIMIT POLICE INTERACTIONS DURING “STAY-AT-HOME” MANDATE

*Press briefing with community leaders TODAY at 3:30 pm via conference call at 413.273.7233
(no pin)*

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - As businesses and individuals in the District of Columbia “stay at home” amid the COVID-19 outbreak, a coalition of local community groups are urging city officials to place a moratorium on nonviolent arrests and limit police-general public interactions in accordance with social distancing recommendations for the duration of the crisis. The letter is available [here](#).

“We recognize the grave and urgent threat to the people of DC the novel coronavirus poses. We understand that necessary measures and precautions will have to be taken to prevent community spread. However, we also know that police and jails are not public health tools,” the group wrote in a letter to DC Mayor Muriel Bowser, along with the entire DC city council and heads of DC law enforcement agencies.

“As a community, we are long overdue for an end to the destructive and failed policies of mass incarceration and excessive policing,” said Chip Gibbons, policy director for [Defending Rights & Dissent](#), the civil liberties advocacy organization that helped organize the coalition. “But in the context of the coronavirus crisis, we know these reforms are also first and foremost a public health imperative.”

“We are in a crisis that our local and national government are woefully unprepared for,” said Calvin Jackson, Co-organizer of [Ward 1 Public Safety Coalition](#) which initiated the coalition effort. “The last thing we need at a time of social distancing is to put our communities further at risk by increased prison traffic and carceral processes. In fact every day current prisoners sit in prison and jail is another day our government is telling those citizens they could care less about their dignity.”

“The likelihood of a stay at home or shelter in place order has dangerous implications for DC’s already over-policed Black communities,” said a spokesperson for [Stop Police Terror Project DC](#). “We are incredibly concerned by the possibility of the MPD or other law enforcement using

these orders as an excuse to inflict even more racist violence on already vulnerable community members, especially young people—this time with the added threat of catching or spreading a deadly virus. We agree wholeheartedly that decarceration is now a public health imperative, as is the ban and discontinuation of the practice of stop-and-frisk in DC."

"We understand that low income working class communities are at a heightened risk not only in terms of health but also with increased economic insecurity," said Delonte Wilkins, Co-Founder, [LinkUp](#). "They will be the ones that are policed the most, and will be impacted the most across the board, as they were prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. We need to take maximum precautions for the protection of our community."

The letter emphasized three key areas of common law enforcement activities and behaviors that the group called on to be curtailed or halted during the District's response to the novel coronavirus:

- If public health warrants "stay at home" orders, such an order should not increase police-general public encounters;
- As much as possible, stay-at-home orders and social distancing must apply to local law enforcement;
- Washington DC must place a moratorium on arrests for nonviolent offenses.

The group also called for the reduction of the current incarcerated population to limit the rate of the spread of COVID-19 in correctional facilities in DC by releasing low-risk individuals, which some states and localities across the country, like New Jersey, have embraced or are considering during the crisis.

The letter was initiated by DC-based organizations [Defending Rights & Dissent](#) and [Ward 1 Public Safety Coalition](#).

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