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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Columbus, OH, March 20, 2020** — On Thursday, March 19th the **Juvenile Justice Coalition** delivered a letter to Governor DeWine, co-signed by the **ACLU of Ohio** and **Policy Matters Ohio**, requesting the creation of a plan to protect young people inside the juvenile justice system from the spread of COVID-19. Ohio joined [22 other states](#) in urging their governors and juvenile justice system administrators to reduce the fatal harm being caused by the novel coronavirus.

The letter outlines three strategies to ensure that facilities are as empty and safe as possible: reduce the population of young people in state and local facilities, mitigate the impacts on youth while they await release, and reduce consequences of probation.

JJC recommends releasing youth who are currently detained or incarcerated and halting the arrest or incarceration of additional youth. While in-person visitations and programs are suspended, youth should not be charged to access phone and video communication with their families and support systems. For youth on probation, any probation conditions which require travel, social interaction, and which cost the families, should not be enforced in order to reduce virus exposure and financial burden.

“The governor has taken steps to protect children and families by closing schools, but children behind bars can’t engage in social distancing or other safe practices. Some adult courts in counties across Ohio are doing the right thing by reducing their jail populations but we need to be doing the same in the juvenile system, and quickly,” concluded JJC Executive Director, Aramis Sundiata.

Research shows that incarcerated populations are most at risk during a public health crisis. As COVID-19 spreads quickly in enclosed spaces, such as cruise ships and nursing homes, it can spread just as quickly in detention centers, prisons and jails, and facilities are not equipped to handle the medical needs of youth if a COVID-19 outbreak should occur inside a juvenile detention or correctional facility

“Children should not be incarcerated to begin with. Leaving them in these conditions, during a pandemic unlike anything we’ve ever seen, should not even be an option,” added Kenza Kamal, JJC Policy Director.

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Juvenile Justice Coalition is a state-wide advocacy organization that works with Ohio youth who are at risk of involvement or involved in the juvenile court system. JJC works mainly through policy advocacy and works with youth and families.