



CONTACT:

Aramis Sundiata, Executive Director
Juvenile Justice Coalition
aramis@jjohio.org
www.jjohio.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Columbus, OH, May 5, 2020 — This week, the **Franklin County Juvenile Detention Center** reported its first positive staff cases of COVID-19. These test results now follow the recent [news](#) that the virus has started to spread in an Ohio youth prison, with 21 youth and nine staff testing positive in Cuyahoga Hills JCF at the [latest count](#).

“Positive staff cases should sound the alarm bells. The virus can only get into facilities if it is brought in, and detained youth cannot socially distance from staff, meaning the young people inside have now been exposed and endangered,” said **Aramis Sundiata, Executive Director of the Juvenile Justice Coalition**.

In March, following the [urging](#) of the ACLU of Ohio and advocacy groups including the Juvenile Justice Coalition, the Department of Youth Services began publishing daily COVID-19 data. There is currently no similar transparency from juvenile jails across the state. “If they wait until their first positive test to take action, it will be too late. Local juvenile facilities must report what steps they’ve taken to reduce their population and improve conditions, and Governor DeWine and DYS must direct these facilities to do so,” said **Kenza Kamal**, Policy Director at the Juvenile Justice Coalition.

“Just isolating youth is not a solution, as that creates solitary confinement-like conditions which are especially dangerous and traumatic for young people,” **Kamal** added.

Research [shows](#) that incarceration is harmful to young people and that Black, Native, and Latinx youth are overrepresented in the system. “When the children who are locked away are disproportionately of color, that means releasing youth is not only a matter of public health, but of racial justice,” concluded **Sundiata**.

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. For youth in state facilities, the ACLU of Ohio and JJC [demand](#) the state test all youth, release all youth to community-based alternatives starting with the most medically vulnerable, and publish the number of youth who have been released and the criteria DYS has been using to determine release eligibility.

###

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