March 30, 2020

Dear Governor Parson:

We are educators in the Washington University in St. Louis Prison Education Project, and we offer college classes that lead to Associate and Bachelor’s degrees at the Missouri Eastern Correctional Center in Pacific, Missouri. We are writing because of our deep concern about the health of incarcerated individuals in the custody of the Missouri Department of Corrections. In the midst of this unprecedented global pandemic, we urge you to take bold action that will save the lives of vulnerable people behind bars in the state of Missouri.

As you are well aware, those who are over the age of 60 and/or are in poor health are particularly vulnerable to the coronavirus. As of today, there are 838 confirmed cases in Missouri, a number that is growing exponentially daily. It is almost impossible for those who are incarcerated to easily practice necessary social distancing or follow the recommended guidelines for hygiene and sanitation. When the coronavirus is introduced in a Missouri prison – and it is only a matter of time before this happens – containment will be difficult, the virus is likely to spread, and deaths will undoubtedly occur.

We urge you to order an immediate review of everyone who is incarcerated in Missouri and provide medical furloughs or compassionate release to as many as possible. In addition to older and infirm individuals, we also encourage you to free those who are just months away from their release date.

Your actions to protect our state have been decisive and proactive: limiting gatherings, declaring a state of emergency, and closing all schools. Consider the next step: protecting those in prison who are most vulnerable to the coronavirus. This is a public health emergency in your state. Those who are incarcerated are your responsibility and at your mercy; their health and their lives are in your hands. Keep them safe. Let them go home.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Washington University Prison Education Project Executive Board