

Jahne Brown

We Mean Everyone

My fellow Americans:

A few days ago, our nation surpassed a terrible milestone. As of this week, over 100,000 Americans have lost their lives to the novel coronavirus. I share in the grief of everyone impacted. The deaths of 100,000 of our loved ones is a national tragedy.

That said, even faced with immeasurable loss and pain, our country remains strong. We are making great strides towards the development of a vaccine and soon, many states will reopen. Our progress is thanks to the sacrifices each of you made. Your patience and compassion have saved lives.

But our work is not done yet. The coronavirus is still present and spreading in our communities, even in those places where most everyone is staying home.

The science is clear on this though. Most people staying home is not enough, and right now in our country there is a group of the population that can't be home. They are locked behind bars in close spaces and dying at remarkable rates.

Our Incarcerated friends and neighbors are unable to social distance or even properly wash their hands and today, I am here to tell you that the whole country is paying for this injustice.

Chicago's Cook County Jail is now the nation's largest known source of coronavirus infections. Left unchecked, our country's massive system of jails and prisons will cost us another 100,000 deaths. Without swift executive action, we will continue to lose many more lives.

That is why, starting today, I am taking important steps to prevent the loss of more life. Over the next few weeks, I will collaborate with governors and mayors to release every detained person in state prisons with less than 18 months on their sentence. Additionally, I will work with local leaders to prioritize the release of all elderly, pregnant, and immunocompromised incarcerated people regardless of their crime and sentence. In the cases where local leaders are not cooperative, I will use my presidential pardon to send each of these people home.

For federal prisons, which are under the White House's jurisdiction, I will send every single detained person home by the end of June and the prisons will for good. The bottom line is Incarceration is standing in the way of the health of our community.

Now, I know this will be a major transition. For far too long, we have been operated by fear locking up and throwing away the key for those we are afraid of.

But I know we are all capable of much more than fear. These past few months you have proved it. You've been committed to empathy – giving away food, masks, and PPE to those who need it. You've been inspired by graciousness --writing thank you cards and letters to our healthcare workers. You've been led by patience and sacrifice --- giving up comforts and conveniences to save the vulnerable. In these scary times, you have risen above fear. You have boldly shown the world that America won't rest until everyone is well.

And starting today, when we say everyone, we really mean EVERYONE.

From now on, when we say every one we're including Andrea Circle Bear -- a 30-year-old incarcerated woman with coronavirus who died after she gave birth while hooked up to a ventilator in prison.

When we say every one we also mean even Ms. Nettie May Lockett – an 89 year old great grandmother with heart problems who is locked up in Indiana during a pandemic.

And starting today, when we say every one we mean Carlos Ernesto Escobar Mejia too. A 57-year-old ICE detainee who died from coronavirus in the horrible conditions of custody.

America -- we cannot let our fear make our words hollow.

When I say I won't leave any of you behind, I mean it.

Starting Today, I'm asking when you say everyone ... you mean it.

I'm excited to welcome our friends and family home.

Thank you.