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## Senate of Pennsylvania

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March 23, 2020

The Honorable Thomas Saylor  
Chief Justice  
Supreme Court of Pennsylvania  
Pennsylvania Judicial Center  
601 Commonwealth Avenue  
Harrisburg, PA 17106

Dear Chief Justice Saylor,

I write to you to express my concern for those currently incarcerated who are at great risk of contracting COVID-19, putting themselves and others in the community at risk. Over the past several years, I have worked with partners across the ideological spectrum to highlight the desperate need for significant reforms to Pennsylvania's probation system and bring an end to mass incarceration. At a time when all Americans are at great risk of contracting this disease, we must demonstrate compassion for those who pose no real danger to society and act quickly before their health is impacted. These are extraordinary circumstances that require extraordinary actions to proactively protect the health and safety of all citizens.

Every branch of government is currently grappling with the fallout from this pandemic. I have been encouraged by steps taken at various levels of the criminal justice system to mitigate the harms of this deadly disease. There is more that we can do to protect our citizens as the spread of COVID-19 continues to spike and is now present in 34 counties across Pennsylvania.

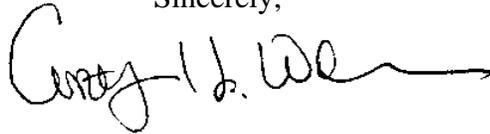
There are approximately 47,000 inmates currently incarcerated by the Department of Corrections. According to analysis by the Council of State Governments (CSG), more than 7,000 are currently incarcerated for supervision violations that often do not involve an individual committing a new crime. Given that CSG's analysis does not account for county probation violators, it is likely that there are thousands more who are currently – and needlessly – at risk of contracting COVID-19.

As we continue to work toward comprehensive probation reform in the General Assembly, I am requesting that the Supreme Court issue guidance to courts across Pennsylvania regarding the immediate release of inmates currently incarcerated for supervision violations that do not involve the commission of new crimes. Additionally, I am requesting that you consider prohibiting the filing of new detainees for probation violations not resulting in the commission of a new crime.

In doing so, courts can provide incarcerated Pennsylvanians and others with immediate relief from the very real danger that this disease presents. I hope that you will consider this necessary step to provide these individuals – and their families – with greater peace of mind in the face of this crisis.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony H. Williams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Anthony H. Williams  
State Senator – 8th District