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Gov. Wolf: Department of Corrections to Establish Temporary Program to Reprive Sentences of Incarceration

Harrisburg, PA – Under the authority granted to him by the Pennsylvania Constitution and the Emergency Management Services Code, Governor Tom Wolf today ordered Department of Corrections officials to establish a Temporary Program to Reprive Sentences of Incarceration to help aid the department in the transfer of qualifying individuals to community corrections facilities or home confinement amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Wolf Administration continues to take every possible action – and asks all Pennsylvanians to do the same – to help stop the spread of COVID-19. These actions, including those in the state corrections system, will save lives, help stop the spread of the virus and avoid overwhelming our already-burdened health care system.

“We can reduce our non-violent prison population and leave fewer inmates at risk for contracting COVID-19 while maintaining public safety with this program,” Gov. Wolf said. “I am pleased to direct the Department of Corrections to begin the process to release vulnerable and non-violent inmates at or nearing their release dates in an organized way that maintain supervision post-release and ensures home and health care plans are in place for all reentrants.”

The Temporary Program to Reprive Sentences of Incarceration Program only applies to state prison inmates who have been identified as being non-violent and who otherwise would be eligible for release within the next 9 months or who are considered at high risk for complications of coronavirus and are within 12 months of their release.

“Just as everyone in the community is dealing with COVID-19, the state prison system is doing the same,” Corrections Sec. John Wetzel said. “We must reduce our inmate population to be able to manage this virus. Without this temporary program, we are risking the health, and potentially lives, of employees and inmates. We can safely release individuals to the community to reduce their vulnerability and allow the department to successfully manage COVID-19.

“Without any current legislation, we are moving forward with the understanding that future legislation could further advance these efforts.”

As of this morning, there are 11 COVID-19 cases at one prison, SCI Phoenix in Montgomery County, but concern for cases spreading to other facilities is another reason for the expedited release of eligible inmates.

Under the temporary reprieve program, approximately 1,500 to 1,800 inmates would be eligible, although given the reentry challenges of ensuring connection to the health care and behavioral health system, housing and food security, the number will likely be less than the eligible pool.

Vulnerable inmates will include inmates aged 65 or older; anyone with an autoimmune disorder; pregnant inmates; anyone with a serious, chronic medical condition such as heart disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, bone marrow or organ transplantation, severe obesity, kidney disease, liver disease,[and] cancer; or another medical condition that places them at higher risk for complications of coronavirus as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The releases could begin as early as Tuesday, April 14.

Sec. Wetzel stressed that a thorough reentry component has been developed to ensure inmates will be successful.

“While we need to release inmates to protect them and to allow us space to mitigate the impact of the virus in our system, we also know that we need to prepare inmates for release,” Sec. Wetzel said. “Our reentry plans will include several days of release planning with the inmate, preparing and connecting the inmate to treatment programs in the community, release transportation and a complete medical screening to ensure that we are not releasing sick inmates. We’ll also provide them with an appropriate medication supply and connect them to medical providers in the community.”

While on temporary reprieve, individuals will be monitored similarly to parolees and will be supervised by parole agents. Upon expiration of the order, individuals would be returned to prison to complete any remaining portion of their sentences.

A copy of the governor’s order can be found as a PDF [here](#) or on [Scribd](#).

Find the latest information, including a daily dashboard, on the DOC’s COVID-19 efforts [here](#).

Find the latest information on the coronavirus [here](#).