

Prison Residents Should Not Receive Stimulus Checks; Instead, the Money Should Be Given to Corrections as Funds

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You can identify the true problem with correctional facilities not by looking at the stem, but at the roots. Snapping off the stem will not solve the problem but uprooting the issue and repotting it with better soil will. Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the United States experienced a crisis in protecting their health while simultaneously maintaining the economy. The populace collectively shut itself behind doors and did its utmost to social distance in order to prevent the spread of the virus. This negatively impacted the economy to such a degree the federal government saw fit to hand out stimulus checks under the CARES Act. Their agenda includes granting eligibility to prisoners. The CARES Act, officiated in March 2020, releases stimulus checks, and the incarcerated are eligible to claim their portion. The primary purpose is to help struggling Americans as their livelihoods were ravaged by the public health crisis (Hackney, 2020). As defined by the U.S. Department of Treasury (2021), it is a fast and direct economic assistance for American workers, families, small businesses, and industries. However, it does not state that the stimulus money is meant for the incarcerated, even if they are also workers in their respective facilities. Those who were unable to claim their check are given a chance to claim it when they file their tax returns (Gilna, 2020). An estimated 1.5 million state and federal prisoners can each receive \$1,200 (Bozelko, 2020), which would cost the government \$1.8 billion, an amount not actually budgeted into the CARES Act according to the data provided by the U.S. Department of Treasury (2021). When you include prison/jail residents, the total rises to \$2.6 billion (Bozelko, 2020).

A stimulus check is meant to stimulate the economy. It is to reassure the public to not worry about paying for basic necessities such as food, house, rent. They can spend their money on other consumer goods to keep the economy running. But the prisoners are already provided the basic necessities by their respective correctional facilities. They do not need stimulus checks. The Treasury Department supported this by writing to Representative Karen Bass, the CBC chair at the time of the statement, that “prisoners generally are more insulated from the economic effects of the pandemic than many others because their basic needs such as food, shelter and health care are already being provided for” (Stockler & Moritz-Rabson, 2021).

It does not matter that the coronavirus spreads faster in prisons than on the streets – that is a concern for the correctional staff to handle, not the public. The stimulus checks are not given out as compensation money, but as insurance. If correctional facilities are facing issues with providing basic necessities and hygienic goods to prevent the spread of the virus and treating patients, then they should be given funds to improve prison conditions. The incarcerated should not have to take responsibility over their own health, buying hand sanitizer or baby wipes simply because the facility is running low in stock. Katrina Brown, incarcerated at the California Institution for Women, claimed she would have used the stimulus checks to order food and hygiene products (Stockler & Mortiz-Rabson, 2021). That is not where her real concern should

be. The very moment a person is under the custody and care of a correctional facility, they are no longer responsible for providing for their own food and hygiene products. That means the issue that needs to be addressed is the correctional facility's funding and operation.

The U.S. government should address the question: what issues are the correctional facilities facing in the face of a pandemic? Prisons are not built to endure pandemics (Park, Blakinger, & Lauer, 2021). The money of the stimulus checks should be given as funds to the correctional facilities. New policies should be negotiated during the transaction to ensure the funds will be used for the sake of the incarcerated. Programs in jails and prisons need funds for both the staff and the residents to keep them busy enough to not form gangs and result to violence. Inspectors should review all private prisons and take necessary measures for to help establish new and amended policies that will ameliorate living circumstances. The bare minimum of wages and lack of funding only serves to corrupt and destroy the guards and prisoners within those walls. When the pandemic first hit, corrections systems responded with inconsistent policies, struggling to contain the virus amid understaffing and overcrowding (Park, Blakinger, & Lauer, 2021). Many argued to solve the issue of overcrowding and stop the spread is to take the most effective approach, which is to drastically reduce prison populations (Park, Blakinger, & Lauer, 2021). The stimulus checks are not addressing the problem, only mitigating the circumstances for a short period of time. We need to think long-term, not short-term.

It is argued that stimulus checks will help provide for the prisoners, as seen with Katrina Brown (Stockler & Mortiz-Rabson, 2021). It is also argued that besides helping the residents with obtaining more hygiene products to protect themselves from the coronavirus, the stimulus checks also help their relatives on the outside who have struggled financially over the course of the pandemic (Hackney, 2020). Prisoners may feel concerned for their families outside of the bars, but that is exactly why stimulus checks are released to the public. To help the families, friends, and loved ones outside of the bars. Those families may apply for their own stimulus checks to stabilize their financial troubles and giving out stimulus checks to residents who should not be needing the money is taking money away from the families who are actually responsible for caring for themselves.

The stimulus checks have already been handed out and prepared for claiming by everyone eligible. The next stimulus checks will not be handed out in most states (Rowan, 2021). The main issue was never addressed at its root. The states who consider releasing a fourth stimulus check should instead focus the money originally directed to the incarcerated into a separate funding project for the exclusive reformation of government-owned correctional facilities, followed by a second proposal for privately-owned prisons run by corporations such as the CoreCivic and the GEO Group. Look to the state governors and representatives in the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) and start advocating on behalf of the incarcerated because our voices will always be heard stronger than theirs will ever be in the ears of those with power to make these necessary changes.

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