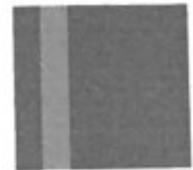


Julia Richerson, MD, FAAP
Pediatrician and Children's Rights Advocate
Louisville, KY



10.2.2020

Director Dwayne Clark
Deputy Director Steve Durham
Louisville Metro Department of Corrections

Dear Director and Deputy Director:

Kentucky consistently leads the nation in the number of children who have a parent who has been incarcerated. About 1 in 9 kids in Kentucky has a parent who has been incarcerated. As a pediatrician, I see first-hand the impact on children when they are separated from a parent. Separation due to incarceration is especially traumatic and damaging to children, on the same magnitude as divorce or domestic violence. The short-term impact in the child results in distress, anxiety, depression and behavioral problems. The impact is also long term and increases the chance of significant mental illness, substance use issues, school dropout and the long-term complications associated with these issues. But these devastating impacts can be mitigated. Family-friendly visitation policies are vital to assure that the child has an opportunity to maintain bonds with the incarcerated parent. Children in our community have had no visitation and no contact with their parents for the past 7 months. We must act now to reunite children with their parents. Children have the right to connect with their parent by phone or video.

On behalf of these children and families, I ask that:

1. LMDC publish weekly reports of the number of COVID-19 cases of people confined in the Main Jail Complex and a summary of the protocols being used for infection prevention and recovery from illness, to address the human needs and safety of those experiencing incarceration,
2. LMDC provide 2 free phone calls per week for incarcerated people for the entire time visitation is stopped due to COVID-19, to mitigate the impact of family separation on all parties,
3. LMDC open visitation again as soon as possible, in recognition of the rights of children to bond with their parent.

Sincerely,
Julia Richerson, MD, FAAP

