

Nearly 300 inmates at Chicago jail test positive for coronavirus



Chicago, April 12 (RHC)-- Almost 300 inmates at a Chicago prison have tested positive for the novel coronavirus that has killed at least 18,000 people across the United States and infected more than 475,000 individuals.

The Cook County Jail reports that 276 prisoners tested positive for the COVID-19 this week, according to Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot. In addition, 115 prison staff have also tested positive for the virus.

The development has fueled fears about coronavirus outbreaks among the prison populations across the United States, which has the highest documented incarceration rate in the world. The 4,500-person Chicago has the largest reported coronavirus outbreak within an American prison so far.

"First and foremost, no one should be locked up if they're not a danger to the community or a flight risk," Lightfoot told CNN. "And certainly not because they can't afford to pay bail."

The family of a prisoner who died in custody filed suit against Cook County and Sheriff Tom Dart on Thursday, claiming he was shackled while died of the virus, according to the New York Times.

Human rights groups including the American Civil Liberties Union have urged U.S. prison authorities to release nonviolent prisoners during the pandemic to mitigate the spread of the virus, but most of the U.S.

states have refused to do so. Only a few states, such as California, announced last month that it planned to release 3,500 nonviolent offenders.

The attorney for Washington, DC, Timothy Shea, last week opposed release of prisoners amid the coronavirus pandemic, arguing that “violent criminals” should not be set free. She expressed the opposition in response to an emergency motion filed by the Public Defender Service general counsel.

According to the motion, outbreaks of COVID-19 “are far from speculative — they are imminent, with confirmed positive cases [at the jail] now approaching double digits.”

The Public Defender Service general counsel introduced the motion after several inmates in Washington jails tested positive for the coronavirus. There are concerns about the conditions of prisoners in American jails as the pandemic is growing fast across the U.S. states amid a shortage of medical supplies.

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