FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
COALITION DEMANDS HEALTH DEPT. INSPECTIONS OF ARIZONA STATE PRISONS

PHOENIX, ARIZONA – April 7, 2020 – Today, a coalition of criminal justice reform advocates and healthcare professionals, led by American Friends Service Committee-Arizona (AFSC-AZ), has formally requested that the Arizona Department of Health Services (DHS) and Director Dr. Cara Christ conduct inspections of state prisons, aiming to ensure their compliance with CDC guidelines on COVID-19.

You can read the letter to Dr. Christ – and forwarded to Gov. Doug Ducey and ADCRR Director David Shinn – here.

For two weeks, AFSC-AZ and our coalition – which includes the Prison Law Office, FAMM Foundation, the S.T.A.R.T. Project and many other local and national organizations – have collected evidence from people who are incarcerated, their families, and disgruntled prison guards that the Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation & Reentry (ADCRR) is not responding adequately to this very serious crisis. ADCRR is not providing comprehensive information on a regular basis to people who are incarcerated, their families, the public, or even to state elected officials. It is not consistently implementing the full scope of recommendations from the CDC for protection of people who live and work in our prisons.

Numerous accounts – many of which were gathered by directly-impacted leaders of AFSC-AZ’s ReFraming Justice Project – show serious inconsistencies between what ADCRR has publicly announced it is doing to adhere to CDC guidelines and the reality of what people who live and work in these facilities are seeing.

The deficit between what the CDC recommends and what is actually being done or provided in our prisons will likely mean the difference in the impact on the spread of the virus and mortality rates.

“If COVID-19 begins to spread inside our state prisons, it will endanger entire communities where those prisons reside,” said Caroline Isaacs, program director for AFSC-AZ. “Tens of thousands of people across this state will be impacted: Correctional officers, their families, the businesses in their communities, as well as people who are incarcerated and their loved ones.

“This is a public health crisis that will uniquely impact an extremely vulnerable population which is literally at the mercy of the state,” Isaacs said. “DHS and Dr. Christ must take action now to help prevent, or at least contain, a serious outbreak.”

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American Friends Service Committee-Arizona (AFSC-AZ) works to reduce the size and scope of the punishment system in Arizona using research and documentation, advocacy, and policy reform to advance sentencing reform, halt prison expansion, and improve conditions of confinement.