

Hello there, my name is Javonne Rich and I am a policy advocate of the American Civil Liberties Union of Delaware. The ACLU strongly supports HB 37, which would create public health emergency credits that will result in the orderly release of people whose sentences will be expiring soon.

People residing and working in correctional facilities continue to be uniquely vulnerable to COVID-19 due to the congregant living environment. Incarcerated people, especially so, can only protect themselves as much as the Department of Correction allows them to. They do not have control over how many people they interact with or are housed with and what tools they are given to keep themselves and others safe. Nearly 2700 correctional staff and incarcerated people combined have tested positive for COVID-19. A prison sentence shouldn't lead to a COVID-19 death sentence, but thirteen incarcerated people have died so far from the virus.

From day one, public health experts have recommended reducing the size of the prison population to contain the spread of COVID-19. Neighboring states, like Maryland and New Jersey, have taken steps by executive order and/or legislative action to reduce the prison population.

And while vaccines are rolling out, there remains unforeseen difficulties. Combining availability of the vaccine, the number of people who will decline the vaccine and the transient nature of the prison population means that prisons will remain hotspots for many more months to come.