

Quotes From Loved Ones of Incarcerated People During COVID-19 Pandemic

“I know to some in this world, they are just inmates. But this particular inmate is my world.” - the wife of man currently incarcerated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Read on for more quotes from loved ones filled with worry and despair as incarcerated people are left to fend for themselves and try to avoid an outbreak of COVID-19.

California

Yezenia Guzman, whose mother-in-law is at Central California Women’s Facility in Chowchilla: “We are panicking. [Saying prison medical staff rarely return her calls] it’s always just up in the air.”

Joanne Scheer, son at Mule Creek State Prison in Ione: “When this virus broke out, we family members, we were not informed what kind of preparation the prison staff was taking to keep our loved ones safe. So as soon as the virus started hitting, of course everybody had questions. The food could be prepared by somebody who is asymptomatic, who doesn’t even know that they have the virus yet. I am scared of this virus. It’s a ticking time bomb.”

Margaret, whose son is at Costa Mesa to Avenal State Prison in the Central Valley: “He's seeing what's on television. He's concerned. He's powerless. I just can't even imagine if the virus would get into a prison or a jail, what that can do to that population of people.”

Diana Zuniga, whose cousin is at Twin Towers jail, Los Angeles County: “Of course we want to see him, of course we want to know how he's doing. It's pretty devastating. When I last saw him, I felt the urgency in his voice of wanting to be out of there and wanting to be in a program that was actually going to help him.”

Colorado

Cheryl Floyd, whose son is at Bent County Correctional Facility: “He's part of the shower washing team. The facility has been spraying the showers with bleach water and my son and another inmate wipe the surfaces down.”

Connecticut

Debbie Sessa, whose friend is at Danbury Federal Correctional Institution: “I can’t relax. I can’t sleep. I used to hear things about prison and think: ‘That’s not really happening.’ And now I am hearing things and I am like: ‘Oh my God!’”

Maryland

Julie Magers, whose husband is incarcerated in Fairmount: “It’s like a train wreck. You just do not want to look. I don’t want to have that conversation. How do we explain this to our children, that you may never see your dad again because the prison didn’t care enough? A child has got to question, ‘Why can’t they protect my dad if he’s so sick?’ We’re not saying open the door and let everybody out. They should expedite the processes that are already in place – like medical parole, geriatric parole and commutations – for the most vulnerable people.”

Minnesota

Laurie Shenk, whose spouse is at Federal Medical Center, Rochester: “[Fearing she will only get a call if he is dead] I just have to keep faith, it's the only thing that’s keeping me going.”

Mississippi

Malaika Canada, whose son is at East Mississippi Correctional Facility in Meridian: “Most of the time my phone’s in my hands. I always have it near me. When I don’t hear from him, it puts me in a panic. It’s kind of like torture. You’re waiting and you’re walking around and you look at the clock, you pick up your phone, you make sure your ringer’s on and try to keep busy. He said the inmates are really scared because they have no way of protecting themselves. Nobody’s telling them anything, right? He’s trying to be careful with hand-washing, but they’re not giving them hand sanitizer and antibacterial things they can use to wipe down their cells.”

North Carolina

Anne Weiss, boyfriend at Butner Federal Correctional Facility: “I don’t know what’s going on. Is he sick again? Is he on lockdown? What are they doing for him in terms of the virus outbreak? Are they testing people in this condition? Nobody talks to you. You are just another loved one of a criminal. They just don’t care.”

New York

Marlene Aloe, whose son is at Rikers Island: “I dread every day when the phone rings that I’m going to get a call saying he’s dead. What mother wants to hear that their son has died from a virus that is like a plague in the jails and they’re not doing anything about it? I sleep maybe one or two hours. I’m waking up in the middle of the night. Is he sick? Is he getting his treatment? Is he eating? I don’t know anything that’s going on with my son. Nothing at all. How is it as a mother that I gave birth to him and I don’t have contact?”

Michelle Lind, whose husband is at Sullivan Correctional Facility in Fallsburg: “We didn’t use to speak every day, but now we do. He calls at 6:30 p.m. every night. By 5:00 my breathing becomes shallow, my chest becomes tight. What if that phone call doesn’t come? I am terrified. My stomach is in knots all day. Every day just waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting. I’m not showering, I’m overeating. I’m stuck on the couch by the window, frozen. I have pains in my chest. I can’t breathe correctly. My

mind is racing. I'm drinking two scotch-and-waters a day – I never did that. It's not OK. I'm smoking two packs of cigarettes a day. I never smoked that much.”

Jolene Russ, whose husband is at Elmira Correctional Facility: “Right now in Elmira, where Bryon is, that's a reception facility. They receive all the people that come from the western counties that are coming from the jails. They haven't answered us if that movement is going to stop. A lot of officials are saying that's where the spread will come from, people coming in and out from other jails and from employees coming in and out from the communities.”

Lavonia Scaggs, whose daughter is incarcerated: “My daughter is vulnerable to catching and dying of the coronavirus, which would leave me to care for her five children. She says, ‘Mom, I'm afraid. People are crying because they are uninformed.’”

Kharon Benson, whose father is incarcerated: “My father was granted parole and had a set date to come out in 2017 until his parole decision was reversed. He is still fighting to come home. A decision on his appeal was scheduled for last week. And now because of COVID-19, it's been pushed back.”

Ohio

Lacona Darrah, whose husband is at North Central Correctional Facility in Ohio: “We can't see each other and support each other now. I am concerned about him being hurt by violence breaking out due to pent up emotions and stress.”

Audrey Maxam, whose son is at Madison Correctional Institution: “I feel my son has turned his life around for the better and what's the harm in giving someone like him a chance because we all know if he messes up again he will have to return to prison. As for my son's safety in prison I don't believe our system cares!”

Oregon

Barbara Dickerson, whose husband is incarcerated: “They are crammed in there like sardines. Their medical [staff] is totally incapable of handling an outbreak.”

Pennsylvania

Hannah Benjamin, whose boyfriend is at McKean Federal Correctional Institution: “I am concerned the lack of adequate attendance will incite panic and a riot, which will do far more violence to the prison population than the COVID-19 will.”

Texas

Andrea McMillian, whose father is at Hamilton Correctional Unit in Bryan: “I wasn't so worried before, but now with coronavirus, I'm calling everyone I can find. He was basically in bad shape going in, and since then has deteriorated tremendously.”

Casey Phillips, whose husband is at Smith County jail in Tyler: “There are honestly times where I fear whether he’ll make it out alive. If he gets sick, it’s possible I may never see my husband again.”

Virginia

William Brewer Jr., whose son is incarcerated: “It’s very concerning as a parent. He’s in there sleeping in an open bay with 60 other people. There’s no way they can isolate and get six feet between each other.”