



Dear Commissioners,

Last March, I issued a letter detailing several recommendations to address the potential spread of Covid-19 in our county jail given the close proximity of inmates and guards. As we've recently seen with the tragic passing of a Lehigh County inmate, our county facilities have proven to be dangerous territory for Covid-19. We should not allow this individual's death to pass without it catalyzing us into action. It should serve as a moment of reckoning for our county as we grapple with the nature of incarceration in America.

Lehigh County's prison census declined during the early onset of Covid-19, but has since risen putting more people in a confined facility risking exposure to this deadly virus. This moment should galvanize us to recognize the necessity of changing the nature of justice in America. The frank reality is, America is the carceral capitol of the world. The ACLU reports that we are less than 5% of the world's population, but have almost 25% of its prison population.

Consequently, the United States also criminalizes and penalizes poverty, detaining people behind bars who lack the means to make bail. The Controller's Office will be releasing a report shortly that details the full extent of this problem in Lehigh County. It will further demonstrate that our system of criminal justice is not just cruel and callous, but in the midst of Covid-19, is unjustly detaining people. There are many detained in Lehigh County who simply cannot post bail, placing them not only at risk of the socioeconomic consequences of pre-trial detention, but now the deadly consequences of a global pandemic.

As I've stated numerous times, Lehigh County has a tremendous role to play in the process of reimagining public safety. Our prison system costs taxpayers almost \$28 million annually, one of our greatest singular expenses according to the 2020 budget. There are too many of our residents held behind bars that should not be, and too many whose lives are needlessly devastated by the long-term consequences of incarceration.





Lehigh County
— Pennsylvania —

OFFICE OF THE CONTROLLER

Mark Pinsley, MBA
COUNTY CONTROLLER

Thomas Grogan, CPA
DEPUTY CONTROLLER

Lehigh County should begin the process of piloting alternative models of restorative justice such as release with community support and the elimination of cash bail. We must recognize that the vicious cycle of incarceration and recidivism neither keeps us safe nor serves our taxpayers well. Those who offend should be permitted to live within their community while they await trial and receive the support they need, to ensure they make their hearing from child care to transportation.

Lehigh County has an opportunity to reconstruct its system of justice in a more humane and compassionate manner that both keeps us safe and serves the well-being of those with whom we're tasked with rehabilitating. A criminal offense should not carry with it a penalty longer than the sentence served and or larger than the extent of the crime.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Pinsley".

Mark Pinsley
Lehigh County Controller

