

For Immediate Release

January 2, 2021

### **Close the Workhouse Campaign Statement on City Jail Protests and Transfers**

The Close the Workhouse campaign stands with those detained inside the St. Louis City Justice Center (CJC) and Medium Security Institution (the Workhouse), and their concerned loved ones, in calling for transparency and accountability surrounding the recent transfer of detainees from CJC to the Workhouse.

Local news outlets initially reported on Tuesday, December 29, that more than 50 detainees had been moved from CJC to MSI following “a disturbance” in the jail. The Mayor’s office stated that the reason for the disturbance was unknown. However, we have learned from impacted detainees, lawyers, and family members that the “disturbance” was really a protest stemming from detainees voicing their concerns about the spread of COVID-19 inside of the jail, and a lack of adequate safeguards for those detained. We have also learned that the response to this protest by jail officials included violent use of force, including macing an entire pod regardless of COVID-19 status or other health conditions.

To date, the City has disclosed no information regarding the status of COVID transmission in either of its jails, nor the concerns being voiced by the people in their custody. In reporting yesterday evening (January 1) following a second protest, President of the Board of Aldermen Lewis Reed blamed overcrowding in CJC and claimed that the situation would be worse if the City had complied with the ordinance it passed in July directing the closure of the Workhouse by the end of the year. Reed’s statements are contradicted by the most recent city jail data, as of December 23, which shows the lowest CJC inmate population since September. Meanwhile, multiple detainees who were transferred to the Workhouse have already experienced uncomfortably low temperatures, lack of clean clothing or bed sheets, and inadequate medical care, particularly for those diagnosed with COVID-19.

Unfortunately, we have many more questions at this time than answers. However, based upon the direct, firsthand accounts of people inside of CJC and the Workhouse, a few things are clear:

- The administration is, at worst, being dishonest, and, at best, withholding information regarding the recent protests in CJC and COVID-19 cases in the jails.
- The City continues to fail to ensure the health and wellbeing of those it has condemned to its cages.
- The Workhouse continues to be a site of suffering and injustice in 2021 because City leadership, including Mayor Lyda Krewson and President Lewis Reed, have failed to keep their word and honor the timeline to close the Workhouse set out in Ordinance 71217.

We are calling on the City of St. Louis, through the Mayor, Public Safety Director, and Commissioner of Corrections, to:

1. Give a full, public accounting of the number of people currently in CJC and the Workhouse that have tested positive, or are under quarantine, for COVID-19;
2. Provide a detailed account, documentation, and video surveillance from the December 29 “disturbance” and response by City officials; and
3. Provide impacted detainees and their families information regarding their COVID status and efforts being made by St. Louis jail officials to provide adequate medical treatment and prevent the spread of the virus.

This campaign will remain in solidarity with those behind bars demanding that they be treated safely, decently, and humanely. We will also share and amplify firsthand accounts from those inside the jail who are raising their voices and their loved ones on the outside fighting for their lives. We ultimately know the Workhouse will continue to be a site of inhumane treatment until it is fully shuttered and the resources that it has claimed for decades are reinvested directly into communities where they are desperately needed.

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