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New Report Provides Snapshot of COVID-19's Impact on Harris County Justice System

In facility where nearly 80% of population is legally innocent, rate of infection is nearly 27 times higher than that of general population

HOUSTON, TX – A [new report](#) from the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC) provides a snapshot of COVID-19's impact on the Harris County justice system. The report analyzes population data beginning on March 19, 2020, when Texas Governor Greg Abbott declared a statewide health emergency. By highlighting the jail's skyrocketing infection rates, the report's authors hope to prevent the Harris County jail from joining correctional facilities in Marion, OH, Chicago, IL, and New York, NY, as a worldwide hotspot for the pandemic.

"If our leaders continue on this path, Houston will soon become an epicenter for coronavirus infections," said **Jay Jenkins, TCJC's Harris County Project Attorney and the report's author**. "County officials must act immediately to rapidly accelerate releases and lower this population, nearly 80 percent of whom are being held pretrial and are legally innocent."

Data in the report shows 201 COVID-19 cases tied to the Harris County Jail as of April 19, 2020; these cases include 108 Harris County Sheriff's Deputies who work in the jail and 93 people being held at the jail. While Harris County overall has a rate of 1.0 infections per 1,000 residents, the jail's rate is significantly higher at 27.2 cases per 1,000 people.

"Incarcerated people and staff deserve protection from the imminent threat of a massive outbreak, both because it is the right thing to do and because an outbreak in our jail will inevitably be followed by a significant outbreak in the wider community," Jenkins said.

[This report](#) is part of an ongoing series of reports on the felony pretrial population in Harris County. The entire series is available on the TCJC website [here](#). TCJC's work to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic for system-impacted Texans is summarized [here](#).

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The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC) advances solutions and builds coalitions to end mass incarceration and build safer Texas communities. To learn more about TCJC, visit www.TexasCJC.org.