

limited. While we have also seen some action by the governor and Board of Pardons, there has been a baffling lack of action by both the state senate and state house, where much of the movement to make a substantial impact must begin. By failing to pass any legislative mechanisms to support the release of older and medically vulnerable people from our prisons last session, members of the General Assembly abandoned a valuable segment of their constituencies and our communities. The lack of a release mechanism for elderly and ill people also harms public safety -- it wastes limited public safety resources on incarcerating those who are the least likely to recidivate.

Pennsylvania's taxpayers spend billions of dollars every year on corrections, paying to unnecessarily keep thousands of people who are aging and sick in prison. These populations are the least likely to reoffend if released, and many have families who can care for them. Pennsylvania's DOC spends \$3.2 million each and every month on prescriptions for people over age 50, an annual medication cost that is 3.5 times higher than for people under age 50.⁴ Pennsylvania's prisons also currently house more than 6,100 residents over age 55, and more than 2,600 people that have already served more than 25 years of their sentence. These were absurd statistics prior to COVID-19's devastating impact on our commonwealth's budget, businesses, and families, but at this point, it is simply irresponsible for Pennsylvania's lawmakers to steward taxpayer resources in this way. Enacting legislative responses like broad medical and elderly release mechanisms would not only help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our commonwealth's prison facilities, but it would decrease the overwhelming financial burden of unnecessary, often counterproductive incarceration on the commonwealth's taxpayers as well.

As we begin this new legislative session, FAMM yet again renews our demand that elected leaders in the Pennsylvania General Assembly swiftly and urgently pass broad medical and elderly release legislation. The Pennsylvanians who live and work inside our prisons are valuable members of their families and our communities and deserve protection from this illness. We are in the midst of the deadliest period of the pandemic yet, and Pennsylvania's incarcerated people and their loved ones are rightly terrified. It is critical that our most vulnerable incarcerated Pennsylvanians be removed from prisons and jails immediately and allowed to quarantine safely in their homes, before we see more unnecessary suffering and lives lost from COVID-19. Continued inaction from the General Assembly is unacceptable.

Pennsylvania needs our leaders to take necessary, bold, and compassionate action in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We urge the General Assembly to pass broad medical and geriatric release legislation as soon as possible. Thank you for considering our views.

⁴ Pennsylvania Department of Corrections.