



#FreeThemAll14

A STATEMENT BY THE 14 IMMIGRATION ATTORNEYS, UNDOCUMENTED ORGANIZERS, AND SUPPORTERS WHO WERE ARRESTED WHILE DEMANDING GOVERNOR NEWSOM:

- Use his power, including mass clemency and emergency release, to free people in state prisons.
- Stop transfers from state and local custody to ICE and between California prisons.
- Stop the expansion of immigration detention in California.
- Hold the detention industry accountable for their mishandling of the pandemic.



Prison is a health hazard, we got a glimpse of it.

We are the 14 immigration attorneys, undocumented organizers, and supporters who locked ourselves to each other and to the gate of California Governor Gavin Newsom's mansion Monday morning, demanding he use his authority to protect the lives of people who are currently incarcerated in California state prisons and detention facilities. We felt it was our duty to act to support our incarcerated community members and clients who have been sounding the alarm about the horrendous conditions they have been forced to survive COVID-19 through for months, to no avail. Governor Newsom has ignored [countless attempts to reach](#) him through conventional channels, including meeting with his office, put forth by advocates like ourselves and family members of those incarcerated. He has also ignored [multiple labor and hunger strikes by our community members inside jails, prisons](#), and immigration detention centers.

IN RESPONSE TO OUR PROTEST, **GOVERNOR NEWSOM RETALIATED** BY INCARCERATING US AND EXPOSING US TO THE SAME DEADLY CONDITIONS THAT WE WERE AT HIS FAIR OAKS MANSION TO DENOUNCE.

In response to our protest, Governor Newsom retaliated by incarcerating us and exposing us to the same deadly conditions that we were at his Fair Oaks mansion to denounce. As COVID-19 continues to spread rampantly across the country, prisons and detention centers have become hot spots for the virus: incarcerated people are 550% more likely to contract COVID-19 than the general population. Since the beginning of the pandemic, at least 40 people have died of COVID-19 in California prisons; as the virus continues to spread in San Quentin and elsewhere, more deaths appear to be inevitable. **Governor Newsom has the power to save lives, but he has refused to act.**

The last few months have made it clear that incarceration is a public health crisis. Despite the risks to our health and those inside the Sacramento County Jail, a rare bail enhancement resulted to us being booked into the jail and held for a total of 16 hours. The public deserves full accountability of the Governor's involvement in our mistreatment, and we are ready to submit FOIAs to get to the bottom of it. CHP chose to arrest us, and then chose to book us rather than cite and release us. Perhaps most egregiously, they then circumvented Sacramento county's zero-bail order, which requires that people arrested for low-level offenses are released without having to pay any bail, to slow the spread of COVID-19.

When one of us asked, "so why are you taking us to the jail, when you could've just cited and released us?" a CHP officer replied, "those orders came from above." **When we asked precisely who the orders came from, he looked at us and said, "Whose driveway were you in this morning?"**

Throughout our arrest and detention, **we witnessed a total disregard for every [COVID-19 precaution](#) Governor Newsom preaches about weekly.** Many of the CHP officers Governor Newsom deployed to arrest

us wore no masks. Several officers told us that they did not need to wear masks and that we did not need to maintain social distance, in flagrant violation of Governor Newsom's own [public health orders](#).

During the time we were held at the Sacramento County Jail, we saw precisely why California prisons and jails have become sites of a completely preventable public health nightmare. It was painfully clear that our health, and the health of every single person who has been detained at the Sacramento County Jail — an institution which due to anti-Blackness and racism is populated [disproportionately by Black and brown people](#) — did not matter to jail staff or public officials. We were stripped of PPE, packed into unsanitary and cramped spaces, forced to expose ourselves and others to the virus, and repeatedly denied medical care, food, and water.

DURING THE 12 HOURS WE WERE HELD AT THE SACRAMENTO COUNTY JAIL, WE SAW PRECISELY WHY CALIFORNIA PRISONS AND JAILS HAVE BECOME SITES OF A COMPLETELY PREVENTABLE PUBLIC HEALTH NIGHTMARE.

While being booked into the jail, we continuously had to ask jail staff to wear masks, and to allow us to maintain social distance from each other. However, we were unable to socially distance in the crowded processing room and holding cells they moved us through. At one point, after a jail official asked us to squeeze 8 people onto a small bench, one of us pointed to a sign that read “Keep 6 Feet Apart At All Times,” and our booking officer shook his head and told us to stop being “cute.”

We entered the jail with PPE—including masks, full face shields, and gloves—but many of us were forced to remove all protection once we were booked. As we were processed, we were made to expose our faces inside of a crowded room before being placed inside another crowded waiting cell. Several of us went hours without face masks, as we were moved between holding cells, hallways and common areas of the jail. One of us did not receive a face mask until right before we were released.

Throughout the booking process, **we were not provided hand sanitizer or any opportunities to wash our hands**, despite being cuffed and uncuffed by CHP and jail officers throughout the day, and being forced to put our hands on jail walls and other shared surfaces. On multiple occasions, **we were required to insert our bare fingers in our mouths** so officers could check that we did not have any contraband hidden in our cheeks or under our tongues. When we asked for hand sanitizer to perform this task safely, officers repeatedly refused, despite the fact that a medical staff member had a bottle of hand sanitizer just one room over. When one of us requested hand sanitizer during a medical screening, **a nurse sprayed watered-down disinfectant and said, “This is county jail, this is as good as it’s going to get.”**

Once booked, we were taken to a holding tank, by which point, we had already been in police custody for seven hours, and had been able to contact supporters outside the jail, who noted that they had the funds and were ready to pay our bail. We then learned that officers planned to “dress us in,” or **force us to strip naked and exchange our street clothes for prison uniforms, and take us upstairs to the long-term housing units.** We repeatedly asked why this was necessary, given that our supporters were ready and able to post bail, and given that having us change in and out of our clothes twice and move to a completely different floor of the jail would add hours to our time, introducing multiple new risks for COVID-19 exposure. Guards told us that they were simply following the Sergeant's orders. One of us asked to speak to the ranking officer on duty,

and she parroted the same party line. We later learned that the office to post bond is closed from 5-7 pm every day during which they were unable to process any bail payments. Every hour in a cage is life-threatening, and people should not be caged for extra time because of unusual office hours.

In the holding tank, several of the phones which we hoped to use to contact our supporters and loved ones outside were inoperable. In order to use the few that did function, we had to press our faces against them in order to be able to hear the barely audible sounds coming from the speakers. We never saw any part of the holding tanks being sanitized.

MANY OF US WERE DENIED FOOD AND WATER FOR THE ENTIRE 16 HOURS THAT WE WERE IN CUSTODY. WE WERE ALSO DENIED BASIC MEDICAL ATTENTION.

Many of us were denied food and water for the entire 16 hours that we were in custody. We were also denied basic medical attention. We had all taken extensive precautions to protect against COVID-19, including getting tested in advance of the protest and wearing both masks and face shields. When one of us — who had tested negative for COVID just a week beforehand and had been sheltering

in place — began to show a high fever, jail staff **artificially lowered her temperature by making her drink cold water, and then re-took her temperature when it was low enough to book her.** A recent [exposé](#) revealed that an ICE detention center in Louisiana used a similar tactic before sending people to be deported.

Likely due to dehydration and lack of food, another one of us became so severely ill that they were vomiting for hours, dizzy, losing their vision, experiencing cold sweats, and suffering from a migraine. When they tried to get medical attention, they were told that there was “just not enough medical staff” to respond. **The toilet inside their small solitary cell was clogged and overflowing with vomit, the guard told them to “reach inside and unclog it, then.”**

Once booked, we were placed in filthy 10-by-6 foot cells. **Trash from previous occupants was still spread throughout the cells, making it clear the cells had not been cleaned or sanitized.** Many of us shared these small spaces with another person, but were only provided **one small 6 foot mattress to share.** We repeatedly pressed the “emergency call button” to ask for extra bedding to allow social distancing and for blankets to keep us warm in the cold cells, but were never granted them. **Five of us were placed into solitary confinement, and an officer confirmed to one of us that the jail regularly places new arrivals into solitary confinement for at least 7-14 days.** People detained with us told us that they were not permitted to make any phone calls or take showers during that entire time.

As it got later in the evening, some of our group tried to sleep but it proved nearly impossible. The lights in the cells remained on as late as 11:30pm. **When a nurse came around late at night to administer medication, presumably to those with medical conditions who were likely more vulnerable to COVID-19, the guards accompanying her wore no masks at all.**

Our group of 14 noticed all of these unsafe and dehumanizing practices during our roughly seven hours in CHP custody and roughly 9 hours in Sacramento County Jail. We know that conditions in prisons and detention centers are just as bad, and often much worse—and that **people are struggling to survive this deadly pandemic while being held in these death traps for weeks, months, and years.**

Despite knowing that some of us are undocumented immigrants, Governor Newsom insisted on having us incarcerated, putting us at risk of deportation. During the booking process, we were repeatedly questioned about our immigration status, place of birth, or nationality. This information is not necessary for local law enforcement purposes. These questions simply endanger and intimidate immigrant community members. As Governor Newsom pays lip service to the recent announcement by the Department of Homeland Security on DACA, we point to his hypocrisy in choosing to put us at risk of deportation simply for exercising our right to free speech.

DESPITE KNOWING THAT SOME OF US ARE UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS, GOVERNOR NEWSOM INSISTED ON HAVING US INCARCERATED, PUTTING US AT RISK OF DEPORTATION.

Many of us are attorneys who have clients inside of the Mesa Verde Detention Facility and Yuba County Jail, where undocumented immigrants have organized hunger strikers and labor strikes demanding their lives be protected from COVID-19 through mass release. Our protest was inspired by their strength and struggle, and we are honored to fight alongside them.

We now have gotten a first-hand look at some of the conditions these brave folks find themselves in amidst this pandemic, and we are as committed as ever to their liberation. As such, we demand that Governor Gavin Newsom immediately:

- **Use his power, including mass clemency and emergency release, to free people in state prisons.**
- **Stop transfers from state and local custody to ICE and between California prisons.**
- **Stop the expansion of immigration detention in California.**
- **Hold the detention industry accountable for their mishandling of the pandemic.**

We condemn the retaliation that Newsom took to punish us for bringing our demands to his house; we denounce the unsafe treatment of people incarcerated in California state prisons and detention centers, who are disproportionately Black, brown, and immigrant; and we are disgusted with the ways undocumented immigrants at the Yuba County Jail and Mesa Verde Detention Facility are being punished for speaking out. **We are seeing terrifying retaliation against organized resistance across the United States, and it is important that we shed light on the abuse and retaliation being faced by migrants in detention fighting to save their lives.**

Governor Newsom has the authority to take all these steps NOW and prevent further death to COVID-19 inside of prisons. His inaction speaks volumes about his disregard for the lives of Black and brown people who due to systemic racism are disproportionately affected by both mass incarceration and COVID-19.

- The #FreeThemAll14

EPILOGUE: “GOOD TROUBLE”

All fourteen of us were taken to a California Highway Patrol building, into what appeared to be a break room. It had been converted into a makeshift processing center. Fourteen chairs sat in rows in the center of the room, facing forward, like desks in a classroom. We joked that we were in after-school detention, but we were also surrounded by a dozen armed police officers. The walls of the break room were covered with posters, some of which urged the reader to remember that “any encounter can turn deadly.”

Most of the officers sat idly by, cracking jokes to one another and getting paid overtime to do so. Several uniformed officers sat at the front of the room, hunched over laptops, pecking our personal information into the system. Above their heads was a small television. It was on, but silent. As we waited for the officers to mispronounce our names, we had little else to do but watch it.

As we had been driven into the CHP parking lot, one of us noticed that the facility’s flags were at half mast. We wondered why at that point. On the soundless television inside, we watched a casket, draped in a flag, being carried up an endless set of white steps. Slowly, we realized that we were watching the service for John Lewis, member of Congress from Georgia, lying in state in the US Capitol. The same person who, as a 20-year-old college student, organized sit-ins at segregated lunch counters in Nashville. Who, at age 25, led the march from Selma to Montgomery, where state troopers brutalized unarmed demonstrators. Who, for his entire adult life, preached the value of “good trouble, necessary trouble.”

One of us said, “You can’t write this shit.” It was like a message from the beyond. A blessing from a departed icon. Confirmation that our trouble was the good kind, the necessary kind. The kind of trouble that gets you a state funeral, when it finally kills you.

The officers did not look at the television. They kept typing. They squinted at their screens and frowned, frustrated by the inconvenience of the paperwork. They looked up only to call us forward to be arrested.

HOW YOU CAN TAKE ACTION

We are more committed than ever to amplifying the voices and leadership of incarcerated leaders, and we are more committed than ever to raising our voices to demand that Governor Newsom take action to save lives.

Here are a few quick ways you can join us:

- [#FreeThemAll Toolkit](#)
- [#FreeThemCA](#)
- [#StopSanQuentinOutbreak](#)
- [#LeadWithMercy Toolkit](#)
- [#NoMoreDeaths Toolkit](#)