

July 8, 2022

Jim Underwood, Executive Director  
Capital Development Board  
William G Stratton Building  
401 S. Spring Street  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Stratton Bldg  
Springfield, IL 62706

Re: IDOC water and sewage analysis

Dear Director Underwood,

We are aware that there is currently a comprehensive assessment of the capital development needs of the Illinois prison system underway. Our understanding is that this process is intended to identify and address the structural problems in our prisons, many of which are well past their anticipated useful life (with several of them more than 100 years old), and some of which, we suspect, should simply be closed as the only way to ensure the safety and health of those who live and work there.

On behalf of the undersigned groups, we are requesting that the capital development process currently underway for facilities run by the Illinois Department of Corrections (“IDOC”) include an in-depth, system-wide analysis of the drinking water and sanitary sewer systems in Illinois prisons and include needed, comprehensive, and lasting fixes. Inclusion of these issues and robust solutions are absolutely essential to protect the health of people who live and work in prisons and to provide greater transparency and accountability to the public and people in prison. To the extent that the evaluation concludes that some prison water systems are not able to be fixed, steps must be taken to ensure people who are incarcerated in these facilities are kept safe and moved places where they can be provided with clean drinking water and sanitary sewage systems.

We believe that the inclusion of water systems in the capital needs assessment is vital to protect the health of Illinois residents, everyone has a right to safe and sufficient drinking water and sanitation. The State has an obligation to provide this to people in its custody and failure to provide these critical water resources can have lasting impacts on health and well-being. For years, people incarcerated in Illinois’ prisons and others who rely on or otherwise have knowledge of prison water systems, including staff and environmental agency whistleblowers, have raised concerns about drinking water and wastewater issues in the prisons. Not only have people inside Illinois prisons reported concerns with water quality based on taste, odor, discoloration, health symptoms, etc., recent news reports of issues with Legionella, copper, lead and potentially other water contaminants have increased anxiety among people who are incarcerated. Moreover, it seems quite possible that these issues stem from the same root cause: deteriorated and poorly maintained drinking and wastewater systems at IDOC facilities.

Given years of deferred maintenance and inattention to facility infrastructure and physical plants at the prisons, it is unsurprising that these water concerns persist today. In sum, Illinois must robustly evaluate our prisons' water systems and propose real, comprehensive, and lasting fixes.

We look forward to your response regarding inclusion of these vital systems in the capital needs assessment of the Illinois prison system.

CC:

Governor J.B. Pritzker, State of Illinois  
Director Jeffreys, Illinois Department of Corrections  
Director Kim, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency  
Administrator Regan, United States Environmental Protection Agency

Signed:

John Howard Association  
Coalition to Decarcerate Illinois  
Equity Legal Services  
Loevy and Loevy  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
Uptown People's Law Center