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US States Release 'Low-Risk' Inmates Over COVID-19 Spread

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Nationwide the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) is still transferring some inmates from coronavirus hot spots such as New York City to prisons in other parts of the country.

Thousands of 'low-risk' inmates in at least 16 U.S. states are being released in an effort to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in crowded jails and prisons.

"Jails can be incubators for disease so we have to take bold and drastic steps," New Jersey's Attorney General Gurbir Singh Grewal said, adding this measure is made to protect the health of prisoners and limit COVID-19 effect in prison population.

The eastern state is the latest to announce such measures, joining California, New York, Ohio and Texas which are among the states where officials are sending low-level offenders and elderly or sickly inmates home early.

The announcement comes after Chief Justice of the New Jersey's Supreme Court Stuart Rabner, signed an order to suspend or commute sentences being served by inmates as a condition of probation or a municipal court conviction.

Meanwhile, nationwide the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) is still transferring some inmates from coronavirus hot spots such as New York City to prisons in other parts of the country, possibly taking the virus to these locations.

The American Federation of Government Employees Council of Prison Local 33 President Shane Fausey urged Monday Attorney General William Barr to temporarily stop the movement of all prisoners.

"I am imploring the attorney general of the United States to stop all inmate movement, shelter in place at least for 14 to 21 days, following the guidance of the White House press briefings," he told Al Jazeera.

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Spokespeople for the U.S. Department of Justice and BOP did not have any immediate comment.

As of Monday, the U.S. has become the third-most country with reported COVID-19 cases, topping around 41,500 across all states. At least 479 people have died and the number of cases is expected to rapidly grow as more people are tested.

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