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The COVID Prison Project delivers testimony to the US Commission on Civil Rights

Drs. Kathryn Nowotny and Lauren Brinkley-Rubinstein present their findings regarding Alabama's inadequate response to the pandemic in prisons.

Chapel Hill, NC: On Tuesday, Drs. Kathryn Nowotny and Lauren Brinkley-Rubinstein submitted joint testimony to the Alabama State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights. The statement was read as a part of a virtual meeting of the Advisory Committee on "The Civil Rights Implications of COVID-19 in the Administration of Justice in Alabama." The project uses data gathered by the COVID Prison Project and others to offer insight into the Alabama Department of Corrections (ADOC) response to the pandemic.

This testimony comes amid calls for increased data transparency on the COVID-19 response in prisons, vaccine prioritization of people who are incarcerated, and broad decarceration to reduce the harms of the criminal legal system on health.

"We would like to emphasize two significant points. First, the data reported publicly by the ADOC are inadequate and do not meet the minimum requirements for accountability as outlined by public health experts," says, Dr. Nowotny, co-founder of the COVID Prison Project. "Second, using the data that we do have access to, ADOC's response to COVID-19 has been inadequate. The testing rate falls far below that of the national average, yet the case fatality rate hints at an unidentified case rate that far outpaces many prison systems across the country." These lapses in proper reporting and accountability are made more worrisome when viewed in light of the Department's apparent refusal to fully adopt CDC Guidance on Management of Coronavirus 2019 in Correctional and Detention facilities.

Dr. Nowotny concludes, "Two of the most effective COVID-19 prevention strategies, reduction of population and vaccine deployment, have been woefully underutilized. Therefore, we suggest that the Committee obtain more data to better understand ADOC's response and require federal oversight of the deployment of equitable testing, treatment, and vaccination for people incarcerated in Alabama."

For more information about the COVID Prison Project as well as current data and analysis of the pandemic in correctional facilities, visit www.covidprisonproject.com.