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Dear Mayor Fischer and Louisville Metro Council:

It is not often that the ACLU of Kentucky finds itself on the same side of an issue as the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP). With that in mind, we feel compelled to shine additional light on the issue that has created this unusual dynamic. On September 24, 2021, the Louisville Correction FOP Lodge 77 [issued a letter](#) calling on leadership to improve working conditions for corrections officers and provide “adequate and humane” treatment for people in the custody of Louisville Metro Department of Corrections (LMDC). The letter cited overcrowding and understaffing, among other issues, as serious problems endangering both LMDC employees and incarcerated people.

The drug overdoses of 15 incarcerated people last month paint a clear picture of what LMDC is facing. No person should be incarcerated for substance use disorder in the first place, and it is particularly concerning that people in need of treatment would be placed in LMDC while there are currently [open beds](#) at local treatment centers. Incarcerating these Kentuckians has never been the answer to substance use disorder, and this ongoing crisis at LMDC presents glaring evidence of a public safety system that oftentimes make communities less safe, particularly for Black and Brown people and those with low incomes.

There are many complex issues when creating policies and programs that truly ensure public safety for all people and equal treatment under the law. Though complex, the foundations of true public safety are no mystery. We know what makes us safer and we have the resources to do it. There is a wide body of research showing investments in housing, health care, jobs, education, after school programs, gun violence prevention, environmental justice, and violence interruption reduce violence and improve quality of life for all people.

Just as we know what can make our communities safer, we also know what makes them more dangerous and can bear witness to this fact by examining current “public safety” programs. [Analysis shows](#) very little evidence connecting the size of police budgets and rates of violence. This is likely because officers spend more than one-third of their time responding to non-criminal calls, and about 80 percent of the arrests they make are for low-level offenses, such as “disorderly conduct” and violations related to substance use



disorder – a mental health issue requiring treatment, not incarceration. These figures can also likely be seen in the types of crimes folks incarcerated in LMDC are charged with. Starting today, Louisville could follow the lead of other cities that have prohibited officers from focusing on some low-level offenses and shift more officers and resources into investigating homicides and violence, a dire need given Louisville’s extremely [low clearance rates](#) in relation to closing homicide cases.

If the dire living and working conditions in LMDC are not enough, let’s take this strange period of agreement between the ACLU and the FOP as a reason to recognize there is a serious problem. We must invest in alternatives to incarceration to reduce the number of people inhumanely crammed into LMDC and make the environment for the few remaining as safe as we can.

Respectfully,

Kate Miller
Advocacy Director