

Andre Dickens  
Mayor, City of Atlanta  
55 Trinity Avenue S.W.  
Atlanta, GA 30303

Doug Shipman, President, Atlanta City Council  
Michael Julian Bond, Atlanta City Council Member, At Large  
Matt Westmoreland, Atlanta City Council Member, At Large  
Keisha Sean Waites, Atlanta City Council Member, At Large  
Jason Winston, Atlanta City Council Member, District 1  
Amir R. Farokhi, Atlanta City Council Member, District 2  
Byron Amos, Atlanta City Council Member, District 3  
Jason Dozier, Atlanta City Council Member, District 4  
Liliana Bakhtiari, Atlanta City Council Member, District 5  
Alex Wan, Atlanta City Council Member, District 6  
Howard Shook, Atlanta City Council Member, District 7  
Mary Norwood, Atlanta City Council Member, District 8  
Dustin Hillis, Atlanta City Council Member, District 9  
Andrea L. Boone, Atlanta City Council Member, District 10  
Marci Collier Overstreet, Atlanta City Council Member, District 11  
Antonio Lewis, Atlanta City Council Member, District 12  
Atlanta City Hall  
55 Trinity Ave. S.W.  
Second Floor East  
Atlanta, GA 30303-3584

*SENT VIA EMAIL*

October 3, 2022

Dear Mayor Dickens and Atlanta City Council,

On behalf of the undersigned civil rights organizations, we write to express our concern and profound disappointment regarding Atlanta's decision to pass Ordinance No. 22-O-1632, which reverses years of progress made by the City to find cost-effective, proven solutions to protect community safety and reduce mass incarceration. In the past few years, Atlanta has made great strides in creating sensible, long-term solutions to community safety and wellness, including reform of its municipal cash bail laws and creation of a Policing Alternatives and Diversion Initiative, which provides alternatives to arrest for people struggling with problematic

substance use, mental health conditions and/or extreme poverty.<sup>1</sup> The City also developed plans to turn its jail, the Atlanta City Detention Center (ACDC), into a center for equity that would instead provide services, reentry programs, and education to community members, leading Atlanta to be celebrated as a model for cities nationwide.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of these laudable efforts by the prior city administration, Atlanta has now reversed course. In August 2022, you passed and signed an ordinance allowing a lease of the Atlanta City Detention Center to the Sheriff's Office of Fulton County, with authorization to incarcerate up to 700 people per day at the facility.<sup>3</sup> This is a dangerously misguided and short-sighted decision. The Fulton County Sheriff claims that additional space is needed to alleviate overcrowding in his jails. But Fulton County's claim of overcrowding is a manufactured crisis. During his tenure, the Fulton County Sheriff has signed leases for several other jails, while tragic reports of abuse and costly lawsuits alleging prolonged detention, neglect, and inhumane conditions multiply.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, hundreds of people in Fulton County custody who could otherwise be released remain behind bars, as authorities fail to utilize other available tools to reduce overcrowding at Fulton County jails.<sup>5</sup> This lease represents another step that, in the name of reducing suffering, will instead result in more people being locked up.

Atlanta's lease of ACDC to Fulton County deals a serious blow to the City's reputation as a national leader in developing innovative criminal justice solutions. As a national civil rights community, we continue to monitor this situation closely, and urge you, Mayor Dickens and the Atlanta City Council, to repeal Ordinance No. 22-O-1632.

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<sup>1</sup> Policing Alternatives & Diversion Initiative, <https://www.atlantapad.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g. Patricia Leigh Brown, *What Would a World Without Prisons Look Like?*, N.Y. Times, Mar. 6, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/06/arts/design/prison-architecture.html>; Adele Peters, *This Atlanta Jail Will Transform Into a Center for Justice and Equity*, Fast Company, Jun. 15, 2020, <https://www.fastcompany.com/90515296/this-atlanta-jail-will-transform-into-a-center-for-justice-and-equity>.

<sup>3</sup> City of Atlanta, Ordinance 22-O-1632, [https://atlantacityga.iqm2.com/Citizens/Detail\\_LegiFile.aspx?Frame=None&MeetingID=3654&MediaPosition=18728.309&ID=30574&CssClass=](https://atlantacityga.iqm2.com/Citizens/Detail_LegiFile.aspx?Frame=None&MeetingID=3654&MediaPosition=18728.309&ID=30574&CssClass=).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g. Kate Brumback, *Sheriff Agrees to Improve Jail Conditions to Settle Lawsuit*, Associated Press, Jan. 22, 2022, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/sheriff-agrees-improve-jail-conditions-settle-lawsuit-82416003>; Ben Brasch, *Agreement Reached in Lawsuit about Fulton Inmates Being Held Too Long*, Atlanta Journal Constitution, Dec. 14, 2021, <https://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta-news/agreement-reached-in-lawsuit-about-fulton-inmates-being-held-too-long/SSCWLWXXBZBNVKNH7IEMUHGSY/>; Jessica Brown, *Settlement Reached over Fulton County Jail Conditions*, 11Alive.com, Apr. 12, 2022, <https://www.11alive.com/article/news/local/settlement-reached-south-fulton-jail-conditions/85-a9a5290c-b8f7-4475-93a2-20a1998d6973>.

<sup>5</sup> Madeline Thigpen, *Why Does Atlanta Want to Lease Its Jail to Fulton County?* Capital B Atlanta, Sept. 14, 2022, <https://atlanta.capitalbnews.org/acdc-fulton-jail-explainer/>.

We would be glad to discuss this matter further. Please contact Eunice Cho, echo@aclu.org and Julian Clark, jclark@aclu.org at the American Civil Liberties Union, Fallon McClure, fmclure@acluga.org, at the ACLU of Georgia, and Robyn Hasan, robyn@womenontherisega.org, at Women on the Rise Georgia, with any questions.

Sincerely,

A New Way of Life  
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)  
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Georgia  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta  
Atlanta Harm Reduction Coalition, Inc  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action  
Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI)  
CAIR Georgia  
Civil Rights Education and Enforcement Center  
Color of Change  
Community Movement Builders  
Detention Watch Network  
El Refugio Ministry  
End Mass Incarceration Georgia Network  
Equal Justice USA  
Families for Freedom  
Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
Georgia Coalition for the Peoples Agenda  
Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights  
Gideon's Promise  
Human Rights Watch  
Indivisible Georgia Coalition  
Institute for the Study of Near Futures  
Justice for Families  
Justice Strategies  
JustLeadershipUSA  
LatinoJustice PRLDEF  
Law for Black Lives  
Legal Action Center  
Mijente  
Multifaith Initiative to End Mass Incarceration, Georgia Chapter

Multifaith Initiative to End Mass Incarceration  
National Black Women's Justice Institute (NBWJI)  
National Crittenton  
National Lawyers Guild  
National Religious Campaign Against Torture  
Neighbors for Abolition  
New Georgia Project  
New Georgia Project Action Fund  
NewLife-Second Chance Outreach, Inc.  
Prison Policy Initiative  
Queer Detainee Empowerment Project  
Reform Georgia  
Represent Justice  
Safer Foundation  
Showing Up For Racial Justice (SURJ)  
SisterLove, Inc.  
Solidaire Action  
Solutions NOT Punishment Collaborative  
Southeast Immigrant Rights Network (SEIRN)  
Southern Center for Human Rights  
Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund  
StoptheDrugWar.org  
The Sentencing Project  
Trans(forming)  
Vera Institute of Justice  
VOTE-NOLA  
Women on the Rise  
Women Watch Afrika  
Working Families Party  
Zealous