

From: [Peel, Jackson](#)
To: [Press](#)
Subject: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: State Legislators Call for Mask Mandates and Transparency Inside Florida's Correctional Facilities
Date: Thursday, September 9, 2021 4:36:18 PM

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**State Legislators Call for Mask Mandates and Transparency
Inside Florida's Correctional Facilities**

Tampa, Fla. – On Thursday September 9, 2021 **Representative Dianne Hart (D- Tampa), Representative Susan Valdés (D- Tampa), and Senator Bobby Powell (D- West Palm Beach)** sent a letter to the Secretary of Corrections **Mark Inch** as well as **Governor Ron DeSantis** imploring them to establish a mask mandate within the State's correctional facilities, and to once again make public the number of COVID-19 cases in our correctional facilities.

Representative Dianne Hart issued the following statement, "It is important that we do all we can to protect those who are in our custody. We saw earlier this year how COVID-19 wreaked havoc on the correctional system. It is time now that we be proactive and mandate masks in our facilities and encourage both staff and inmates to be vaccinated."

Representative Susan Valdés added, "It is imperative that the Department of Corrections act with full transparency in ensuring those housed in our state correctional facilities are protected from COVID-19. Unvaccinated employees, in particular, have the potential to be a major vector of viral spread to the prison population. Preventable exposure to a deadly virus should not be part of anyone's sentence. I join Representative Hart in calling for the Department of Corrections to take every possible measure to preserve the health and well-being of those housed in Florida's correctional facilities."

Senator Bobby Powell said, "The inability to socially distance, overcrowded correctional facilities and the disproportionate number of inmates suffering from chronic health conditions are a deadly combination of circumstances that require that the Department of Corrections actively work to reduce the transmission of the COVID-19 delta variant. We implore DOC to encourage staff and inmates under DOC's supervision to receive the vaccination and mandate the use of face masks in correctional facilities. For the sake of transparency, it is also imperative that infection rates among staff and inmates be made public. Staff, inmates and family of inmates

who are aware of the virus' prevalence are better equipped to protect themselves and others against infection."

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