An Open letter Governor Ivey, Commissioner Dunn, and the Alabama Legislature –

The State of Alabama continues to pursue shortsighted, counterproductive solutions to the unprecedented crisis in Alabama prisons.

Today the Alabama Department of Corrections announced the partial closure of Holman Correctional Facility and the abrupt transfer of over 600 people who had been housed there. Neither their families nor their lawyers were notified ahead of ADOC’s press release. There is now no maximum security prison below Birmingham, meaning that family members living in south Alabama will have to travel hours to visit their loved ones.

Since its opening in 1969 as a maximum security prison and Alabama’s primary death row for men, Holman Prison has been a site of death and racialized violence in our state. Alabamians for Fair Justice celebrates the shuttering of such a place, while condemning the reckless and irresponsible manner in which the State of Alabama has made this decision.

To be clear, this choice will exacerbate already unacceptable levels of overcrowding and understaffing in ADOC – a system with 40 percent of required staff and 169 percent overcrowding. It will almost certainly lead to more violence and death as people are sent to Donaldson – staffed at 35%, with 137% occupancy, St. Clair – staffed at 34%, with 92% occupancy, and Limestone – staffed at 60%, with 132% overcrowding.

It is hard to imagine that Holman correctional officers currently based in Escambia County will be able to fill posts at these north Alabama prisons. Overcrowding at the remaining prisons will contribute to further understaffing, and together they will lead to more violence and death. Recent tragedies in Alabama and Mississippi prisons show that this is all but certain.

Prisons should be closed. But the reason to close prisons is because their occupants have been set free – not because they are to be sent back into the crucible of the nation’s most violent correctional system while state officials conspire to build more large prisons. The closure of south Alabama’s only maximum security prison on the heels of Commissioner Dunn’s insistence on building new prisons strongly suggests that ADOC is planning a new prison in south Alabama. But the ADOC’s reliance on construction will do nothing to cure its real ailments – pervasive understaffing, , staff corruption, rampant drugs,suicides and a culture of violence rather than rehabilitation And above all, too many people in its dangerous prisons.

It’s hard to imagine a scenario where any other government agency with such a bad track record would be given billions more to do more of what it’s done so poorly.

Today, as hundreds of families reckon with the knowledge that their loved ones are being sent across the state against their will, Alabamians for Fair Justice remembers the lives that have been lost at Holman – those who were killed by the state, and those who died as a result of its neglect and indifference. The names of those known to have died in the last year are listed below.

At the same time, we remember that incarcerated organizers with the Free Alabama Movement started a nationwide movement from behind Holman’s walls in 2016. We [renew our call](https://alabamafairjustice.org/press-releases/adoc-confirms-four-deaths-in-alabamas-prisons-in-december) to include currently and formerly incarcerated advocates, family members, and other advocates in any task force addressing the ongoing prison crisis. We call on the House and Senate leadership to adopt [meaningful legislative reforms](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d6042920df26b000191745c/t/5dbc5b788dafc95310ae6ca7/1572625272740/Alabamians%2Bfor%2BFair%2BJustice%2BSentencing%2BReform%2BProposals.pdf) to reduce the number of people in prison. We continue to demand that Alabama do better.

At least eight lives were lost at Holman between January 2019 to January 2020:

* James McClain – died of unknown causes, January 22, 2020
* Antonio Bell – died of unknown causes, January 9, 2020
* Moses Robinson – died following an assault, December 31, 2019
* Willie Leon Scott – died following an assault, December 6, 2019
* Ricky Gilland – died of unknown causes, October 18, 2019
* Christopher Lee Price – executed on May 30, 2019
* Michael Samra – executed on May 16, 2019
* Domineque Ray – executed on February 7, 2019