



**\*\*PRESS RELEASE\*\***

**For Immediate Release:** April 15, 2020

**Contact:** Resha Swanson, [resha@adelantealabama.org](mailto:resha@adelantealabama.org), (573) 855-1766

**JEFFERSON COUNTY SHERIFF REFUSES TO RELEASE COVID-19 PLAN FOR JAILS,  
ADVOCATES RESPOND WITH #FreeThemAll CAMPAIGN**

BIRMINGHAM, AL – Despite pressure from advocates, the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Department, headed by Mark Pettway, refused to publicize its plans for protecting inmates in the two county jails from a COVID-19 outbreak.

A [letter](#) was sent to the Sheriff last week, spearheaded by Adelante Alabama Worker Center and co-signed by thirteen other Birmingham organizations. It called on Sheriff Pettway to release everyone from Jefferson County Jails, starting with those most vulnerable to the novel COVID-19 virus because of age or pre-existing conditions. The letter went on to demand that Sheriff Pettway release his plans for preventing the spread of the virus within his facilities.

Gervasio Rosales Garcia suffers from severe diabetes and spent nearly 24 hours in a Jefferson County jail earlier this year, which he says he “wouldn’t wish on anyone”. “I was in a 8x6 cell with two other people,” says Gervasio. “There was a toilet and a sink a few feet from the door, but we didn’t have soap. It’s impossible to practice social distancing in that place. As someone with a preexisting condition, I would fear for my life if I was still in there.”

Adelante’s campaign to [#FreeThemAll](#) echoes [a nationwide call to release](#) people from county jails, state prisons, and immigrant detention centers. A number of other facilities have begun freeing people, including [Mobile Metro Jail in Alabama, who recently released a third of their population](#) after several of their staff and inmates fell ill. The Birmingham-based group [Shut Down Etowah](#) recently [demanded that Sheriff Horton of Etowah County release everyone](#) from his facility – which serves as both an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention center and county jail – noting that, “people in detention are highly vulnerable to outbreaks of contagious illnesses.”

The letter also includes a number of other demands, such as ending cooperation with ICE and the Sheriff’s Department, stopping new arrests and detentions, ensuring inmates have access to adequate hygiene, and ending the practice of using solitary confinement as a quarantine measure.

"Sheriff Mark Pettway has the power to release a significant portion of people in Jefferson County Jails and prevent a deadly outbreak of COVID-19, or worse, the loss of lives," warns Gabriel Cabán Cubero, an Organizer at Adelante. "My hope is that when it comes to keeping one our most vulnerable populations safe, he'll live up to his oath to 'protect and serve'." Those interested in joining Adelante’s campaign to [#FreeThemAll](#) can sign their [petition](#).

**View Full Text of Letter:** <http://adelantealabama.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Letter-to-Sheriff-Mark-Pettway-April-10th-2020.pdf>

**Link to Petition:**

<https://adelantealabama.z2systems.com/np/clients/adelantealabama/survey.jsp?surveyId=12>

###

*Adelante is a nonprofit organization that unites low-wage immigrant workers and their families in the Birmingham area to defend our rights, promote our dignity, and pursue justice for all. To learn more and get involved visit [www.adelantealabama.org](http://www.adelantealabama.org)*