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ACLU of Utah Statement on the Legislative Audit of Healthcare in State Prisons

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Under the federal and Utah constitutions, state and county governments are required to maintain and protect the health, safety, and dignity of the people who they incarcerate. While people in jail and prisons are serving time for criminal convictions, they never lose those rights. The recent audit finding "systemic deficiencies" in Utah's healthcare system for people incarcerated by the state may have been completed during a pandemic, but the issues go back many years.

The ACLU of Utah continues to call for robust, transparent, and dramatic efforts to provide incarcerated individuals with, not only protection from the unique threat posed by Covid-19, but all their healthcare needs. This audit confirms the reports we have received from incarcerated people related to serious issues in care delivery in prison, whether they are related to the challenges of the pandemic, or care for serious medical conditions, or even lapses in routine care. This critical report should be read as a clarion call for reforming the healthcare system inside Utah's carceral settings.

While the long list of suggested reforms recommendations in the audit are all important measures, corrections officials cannot realistically implement them without meaningfully increased funding and support from the Utah Legislature. Lawmakers need to back up their outrage with increased funding for healthcare. The Legislature should also encourage corrections officials to candidly request any additional measures and assistance that may go beyond what the audit contains. Critically, the people of Utah should continue to work towards implementing more and better alternatives to incarceration to advance public safety. After all, the health risks and problems only increase with more people inside the prison, and especially with a contagious disease like Covid-19, the health of those in prison is connected to the entire community's health.

Link: *A Performance Audit of Healthcare in State Prisons* (December 2021); Office of the Legislative Auditor General; https://olag.utah.gov/olag-doc/2021-17_RPT.pdf