

BLACK, PUERTO RICAN, HISPANIC & ASIAN LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

NEW YORK STATE

Statement from the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, & Asian Legislative Caucus on the COVID-19 Risk in New York Prisons

NEW YORK, NY (November 25, 2020) — For the majority of 2020, New Yorkers across the state have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, over 33,000 souls have been lost and over 600,000 of our friends and neighbors have been infected. Countless jobs have been lost, residents have been displaced, and students are struggling to keep up with any semblance of regular education. And while we have seen promising news about a pending vaccine, far too many vulnerable communities need relief now.

It is for this reason that we, in partnership with the *Asian Pacific American Task-Force* and *NYU Law School's Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law*, held a virtual roundtable on Tuesday, November 17, 2020 to discuss the needs and concerns of New Yorkers at high risk of infection inside of jails and prisons.

“We can no longer delay the release of the incarcerated individuals most vulnerable to COVID-19 due to their advanced age or underlying health condition,” stated **Assemblyman Ron Kim**, co-chair of the *Asian Pacific American Task-Force*. “These are human beings who are being exposed to a deadly virus in prisons that are not designed to offer safety in the event of a breakout, or medical care in the aftermath.”

“We are deeply concerned with recent evidence that shows serious racial disparities in the New York State Parole Board’s release rates,” said **Chair-elect Assemblywoman Michaele Solages**. “For far too long, Black and Latinx people have borne the brunt of New York’s racist criminal legal system. We have already made great strides towards justice for all by passing important reforms to policing and bail, but know we must act urgently to address the racial disparities of the parole and prison systems, and of COVID-19 deaths behind bars.”

“While we call on the Governor to immediately grant clemency to incarcerated elders, immunocompromised people, and people within one year of release to avoid future COVID-19 infections and fatalities, we know that legislative reforms are needed to uproot racism behind bars. We look forward to working with advocates and members of our community to pass parole reforms in the 2021 legislative session, including the **Fair and Timely Parole Act**, to ensure that the release process in New York is guided by fairness and justice, not racism and unnecessary punishment.”

NOVEMBER 25, 2020

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