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[Livestream from press conference here](#)

***In Wake of Coronavirus Outbreak, Health Experts, Advocates
and Elected Officials call on Gov. Cuomo to Release
Incarcerated People Vulnerable to Virus***

***The Group Held a Press Conference to Call on Cuomo to
Grant Emergency Clemencies to Older and Sick New Yorkers in Prison***

Anthony Dixon, Director of the Community Engagement, the Parole Preparation Project

New York, NY – March 11, 2020 –Today, public health experts, elected officials, and advocacy organizations, including the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, Parole Preparation Project, VOCAL-NY, Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club, and Worth Rises held a press conference on the steps of New York City Hall in the wake of the Coronavirus outbreak. The group called on Governor Cuomo and the state legislature to take immediate action in support of incarcerated people and their families by granting clemencies to vulnerable people in prison, including older and sick incarcerated people.

The group also called on the legislature to take immediate action by passing Elder Parole (S.2144/A.9040) and the Fair and Timely Parole Act (S.497A/A.4346A), and to ensure that prison phone calls and visiting are accessible to people in prison and their families as the virus continues to spread. They also called for an end to prison labor exploitation and for the labor of incarcerated people to be fully compensated.

Jose Saldana, Director of the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign said, “Medical Reports are warning that the Coronavirus is potentially fatal for the elderly, especially those with chronic health conditions and compromised immune systems. What will Governor Cuomo do to protect the lives of the more than 10,000 elderly men and women incarcerated in prisons across the state? Hopefully, he does more than they had done for the roughly 675 elderly men and women who have died in prisons across the state in the last nine years. We call on the governor to start the process of extending clemencies to the vulnerable elderly incarcerated men and women in state prisons, who are facing death during this serious time.”

Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez said in a statement, “The spread of Coronavirus seems to be growing from concern to urgency and could become a full-blown health crisis in New York. There is a population that’s uniquely vulnerable that we need to remember: older and seriously ill people in our prisons. Once the virus spreads to our prisons, older incarcerated people and those with preexisting health problems will be in the virus’s crosshairs and the

prisons will not have the capacity to care for them. Now would be a good time for Governor Cuomo to consider the clemency petitions of these vulnerable incarcerated people. My office stands ready to assist the governor in the consideration of these petitions for those from Brooklyn.”

Oliver Fein, M.D. and Chair of the Board for Physicians for National Health Program – NY Metro chapter said in a statement, “The threat of the Coronavirus pandemic is particularly high in prison settings. Prison environments are similar to nursing home environments, where residents are in close contact on a daily basis. Given the Kirkland, Washington experience, in which 18 residents of a nursing home have died from Coronavirus infection, it is reasonable to be concerned that the elderly and sickest populations in prisons are also at high risk. Release of such vulnerable incarcerated people is a moral imperative.”

Jack Beck, corrections health expert and former Director of the Prison Visiting Project at the Correctional Association of New York said, “It is just a matter of time before this virus enters New York State prisons and jails. When it does, it will inevitably spread. Prisons are not built to control and prevent the spread of viruses. We should take the affirmative step of releasing older people and others who are vulnerable to contract this virus when it begins to enter the prison system.

Allen Roskoff, President of the Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club said, “Governor Cuomo must release the elderly and sick from prison to avoid a likely potential catastrophic outbreak that cannot be controlled behind prison walls. The governor must send the elderly home where they can be protected from illness before it is too late. If Governor Cuomo fails to act, needless deaths will occur to the incarcerated, prison staff and thus to those throughout New York. In this health emergency caused by the coronaries virus pandemic, these humane measures must be implemented with great haste.

Anthony Dixon, Director of Community Engagement for the Parole Preparation Project said, “Rather than release or issue executive clemencies to elderly incarcerated people with the stroke of the pen, so that millions of dollars can be added to his war chest for combating the coronavirus, the Governor is instead resorting to being a slave driver. Essentially, the governor is confronted with two crises, the coronavirus and a staggeringly 1 out of 5 people in New York state prisons being older adults. This crisis must be addressed.”

Bianca Tylek, Executive Director at Worth Rises said, “While our elders are languishing in prison under significant threat of a lethal illness, Governor Cuomo is gloating about having them mass produce hand sanitizer to protect the public all for as little as \$0.26 per hour. The slave labor used in New York prisons is abhorrent every day, and even more so during a public health crisis. Governor Cuomo must release our elders and sick, and stop the abuse of prison labor by increasing incarcerated peoples’ wages.”

Martin Garcia, Community Coordinator at Worth Rises stated, “Governor Cuomo should take immediate action to make all communication in New York’s prisons free so that families can check on the health and wellbeing of their loved ones inside and vice versa. Crises like the

Coronavirus pandemic simply illustrate why the ability for families to communicate is so important every day.”

Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas, Candidate for New York State Assembly (AD-34) said, “This is a compounding crisis, a crisis of incarcerating elders who will end up dying in prison if we don’t release them. The Coronavirus will impact the vulnerable lives of our elders and immune-compromised people in prison. We demand that the governor release elders and those who are immune-compromised immediately. Queens demands that we have them home with their family, so that they can be safe and healthy. For the long-term, we must pass the Elder Parole Act and Fair and Timely Parole Act. When I’m elected to the state legislature, I will be a champion for this issue.”

On Monday, March 10th, [Governor Cuomo announced that incarcerated people at Great Meadow Correctional Facility would produce hand sanitizer](#) for New Yorkers across the state; a product they will likely be banned from using themselves. To date, Cuomo has not proposed or issued any orders to protect the health and well being of incarcerated New Yorkers who are particularly vulnerable to the virus.

Governor Cuomo has issued two clemencies to New Yorkers in prison in 2019 and 2020 combined, neither of which was given to older or sick incarcerated people. On February 18, 2020, President Trump issued four clemencies to people in federal prison, [representing more commutations than Cuomo granted in the last two years](#). There are more than 10,000 older adults in the New York State prison system, including dozens who are confined in hospice units, units for the cognitively impaired, and regional medical units.

Jose Saldana, Director of the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign

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