

For Immediate Release

Contact:

Dave George, 631-885-3565 / ddgeorge23@gmail.com

May 11, 2020

**Advocates Respond to Gov. Cuomo's
Exclusionary COVID-19 Prison Release Plan:
Excluding People Effectively Sentences Them to Death**

(New York, NY) – Today, the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, Parole Preparation Project, #HALTsolitary Campaign, VOCAL-NY, Worth Rises and Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club released the following statement in response to [a report](#) from *the New York Law Journal* that Gov. Cuomo is slightly expanding his narrow COVID-19 prison release mechanism to allow the early release of incarcerated people within 90 days of release who are convicted of non-violent crimes:

“Governor Cuomo says he opposes the death penalty while effectively sentencing tens of thousands of New Yorkers to potential death-by-incarceration amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. We reject the notion that only people convicted of non-violent crimes within 90 days of release should be saved from COVID’s spread behind bars. Public health protocols show that combating the spread of this virus requires a massive reduction in prison population; Cuomo is ignoring these best practices and hoping to spin his way through the crisis already taking over his prisons through public relations alone.

Incarcerated New Yorkers previously convicted of violent crimes, especially older people and those who have already served decades in prison were not sentenced to death, and research shows they pose the least risk to public safety upon release. Many would instantly become community leaders upon release and would promote health and safety in communities across New York State, something that is desperately needed now more than ever. These long-incarcerated women, men and gender non-conforming New Yorkers are precisely the people most vulnerable to serious illness from COVID-19. We call on the Governor to immediately stop putting politics ahead of people and instead grant mass clemencies to New Yorkers behind bars without excluding entire categories of human beings.”

Background: As of May 10, 434 incarcerated people and 1,177 staff in New York’s prisons have tested positive for COVID-19. Fifteen incarcerated people and 4 prison staff have died from the virus. DOCCS has only tested 1-2% of incarcerated people. Despite calls from [advocates](#), [attorneys](#), [family members of people in prison](#), [public health experts](#), [members of Congress](#), [district attorneys and philanthropists](#), and [high profile celebrities](#) for the state to release large numbers of people from prison in response to the virus, the Governor has yet to issue a single clemency since the pandemic began. Governors in California, Illinois, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Washington have issued hundreds and thousands of clemencies to mitigate the harm of the virus in their state prison systems.

###