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To: New York State Senate Standing Committee on Crime Victims, Crime and
Correction

Re: Parole Board Policies and Conditional Pardons

Dear Chairman Gallivan and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

I spent 23 years with the Albany Police Department, rising from patrol officer to chief. I am here to explain how paroling and pardoning individuals who committed serious crimes—but who have taken responsibility for their own rehabilitation and who do not pose a public safety threat—can make communities safer.

I am not here to minimize the seriousness of these crimes—I witnessed the pain of too many victims as a detective sergeant and again as a detective lieutenant in Albany's Children and Family Services Unit. I believe that these parole and pardon decisions are in the best interests of everyone in our community, including the victims.

The most important barrier I see to law enforcement reducing violent crime is the cooperation of the community. Without communication from the community, we cannot prevent crime, and we cannot solve crime. Our detectives depend on information from witnesses to come up with leads, understand what happened, and close cases.

When parole boards release people who no longer pose a threat to public safety, or when the Governor restores their voting rights, it can improve community relations with law enforcement. These individual acts contribute to restoring faith in the criminal justice system. I cannot overstate how important the community's faith in the criminal justice system is to the police's ability to protect and serve.

Parole also reduces overcrowding and frees up criminal justice resources to focus on those who really do pose a public safety risk. We must reserve our limited prison space for those who threaten our safety.

Of course, it also drains our financial resources to incarcerate people who no longer need to be incarcerated. We can invest the savings in victims' services and mental health treatment, which are proven to actually prevent others from committing violent crime.

I know it is easiest to point to these individuals' crimes as justification for never giving them a second chance. I ask you to take the more informed path of supporting parole and restoration of voting rights, which will bring public safety benefits for us all.

Many thanks for your time today and the opportunity to speak on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Chief Brendan Cox (Ret.)
Albany Police Department
Albany, NY