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***Justice Advocates Held Press Conference to
End 24-Hour Demonstration in Albany Laying
Body Bags on State Capitol Steps***

*The Group Placed Responsibility of Prison Deaths
on Lawmakers and Demanded They Pass HALT
Solitary Confinement, Elder Parole, and Fair and
Timely Parole Bills This Week to Prevent More
Deaths in Prison*



Advocates participating in a silent march holding body bags to represent the people who have died in New York State prisons

July 21, 2020 (Albany, New York): Community leaders and advocates hosted a press conference to end their 24-hour demonstration in Albany laying body bags on the steps of

the New York State Capitol. The group placed responsibility of New York's state prison deaths on lawmakers and demanded they pass HALT Solitary Confinement, Elder Parole, and Fair and Timely Parole Bills this week to prevent more deaths in prison.

The latest instances of police violence and racism in New York and across the United States come as there has been a sharp rise in deaths with vast racial disparities in New York State prisons. This continues a longstanding "scourge of racial bias" in New York State prisons -- from violent interpersonal racism by staff to the use of solitary confinement to parole denials that enforce death by incarceration. It also comes in the midst of a surge in suicide and self-harm in New York State prisons, with solitary confinement as a primary driver.

Elder Parole would allow the State Board of Parole to provide an evaluation for potential parole release to incarcerated people aged 55 and older who have already served 15 or more years, including some of the state's oldest and sickest incarcerated people. Fair and Timely Parole would provide more meaningful parole reviews for incarcerated people who are already parole eligible. The Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act would end the torture of prolonged solitary confinement and replace it with more humane and effective alternatives while still allowing for true medical isolation as needed. The bill has more official legislative co-sponsors than the number of the votes needed to pass, and has been awaiting a full floor vote for more than a year. These measures would save lives and begin to reverse some of the damaging policies that have upheld systemic racism and fueled mass incarceration in New York State.



Body bags and tombstones of people who have died in New York State prisons in a prison graveyard outside the capitol building

Speakers from the press conference said the following:

Roger Clark, Civil Rights Leader with VOCAL-NY, said, “People should not have to lose their lives in prison. They have family members. They could be out here living their lives. The Legislature needs to pass HALT solitary, Fair and Timely Parole, and Elder Parole.”

Teanna Taylor, whose father is serving a life prison sentence, said, “We need to let people like my father free. We need to stop the madness that is breaking up families across the country. We need to pass these three bills.”

Thomas Kearney, Capital Regional Organizer with the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, said, “When it comes to corrections and policing, Black and Brown people

are the ones who are “correctected” and policed. That’s why we spent 24 hours in Albany. How many more people have to die? We need to pass these bills. This stops now.”

Jose Saldana, Director of the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, said, “No one who is complicit with mass incarceration gets to define what justice looks like. We define what justice is for us. When our legislators fail to pass bills for racial justice, then we’ll hold them accountable. They are complicit in every single prison death.”

Jon McFarlane, Civil Rights Leader with VOCAL-NY, said, “What do we do when we elect Democrats to all branches of government and they refuse to HALT solitary and pass Elder Parole? What is it going to take for them to pass these bills? Pass these goddamn bills and put them on Cuomo’s desk. Make him veto them.”

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