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Justice Advocates Launched 24-Hour Demonstration at NY State Capitol to Demand Lawmakers Pass Prison Reform Bill Package

The Group Began the Action with a Press Conference in Support of the HALT Solitary Confinement, Elder Parole, and Fair and Timely Parole Bills Next to an Installation of a Replica Solitary Confinement Cell and Prison Graveyard to Highlight the Torture and Deaths of Incarcerated People

Zoom Recording [Here](#)



Advocates' Replica Solitary Confinement Cell at the NY State Capitol

July 20, 2020 (Albany, New York): Community leaders, state lawmakers, and advocates impacted by incarceration held a press conference to announce a 24-hour demonstration at the New York State Capitol to call on lawmakers to pass a prison reform bill package to end the torture of solitary confinement and long prison sentences that cause people to grow old, sick, and die in prison regardless of their personal transformation. As the legislature returns to session this week, the group called for the passage of the HALT Solitary Confinement Act, Elder Parole, and Fair and Timely Parole Act next to their installation of a replica solitary confinement cell and prison graveyard to highlight the torture and death of incarcerated New Yorkers.

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.



Tombstones with some of the names of people who have died in New York State prisons during Governor Cuomo's time in office

Speakers from the Press Conference said:

Victor Pate, New York State Community Organizer with the #HALTsolitary Campaign, said, “I am a survivor of solitary confinement. Solitary is torture. I saw elders languish in prison. Their lives matter. What are Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins waiting for? Pass HALT, Elder Parole, Fair and Timely Parole.”

Jose Saldana, Director of the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, said, “This issue is personal to me. I’m standing in front of the tombstones of people I know and people who mentored me. Assembly Speaker Heastie and Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins can’t just pass cosmetic policing reforms. We demand real justice.”

Assembly Member Carmen De La Rosa, lead sponsor of Elder

Parole, said, “Solitary confinement is state sanctioned torture. Our elders deserve to be released from prison. Black lives matter in the streets and in the prisons. If we don’t act, then we all have blood on our hands.”

Shawn Young, Community Organizer with All Of Us, said, “The violence that we see on the streets happens every single day in the prisons. I was released 13 months ago. This violence is personal to me. Enough is enough. We need to pass these bills right now.”

Assembly Member Harvey Epstein, said, “We must do better. We must take action. Black lives matter. Black trans lives matter. We need to pass these bills and the entire justice roadmap.”

Jolene Russ, whose husband has served 20 years in prison, said, “Look at all these signs. Look at all these tombstones. Why do we let this happen? My husband has been in prison for 20 years. He has been tortured. We need him home. Let them go.”

Jovada Senhouse, Community Leader with VOCAL-NY said, “We need to release the elderly from prison, we need to release the pregnant women. The C-19 in there is killing them in there. They aren’t releasing them, just putting them in solitary confinement. That’s inhumane, it’s torture. The people inside are people; we can’t forget that.”

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