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Contacts:

Dave George, [ddgeorge23@gmail.com](mailto:ddgeorge23@gmail.com); 631-885-3565

Katie Schaffer, [kschaffer@communityalternatives.org](mailto:kschaffer@communityalternatives.org), 646-265-2044

***Amid Calls for Racial Justice and Defunding Police, Advocates Held Press Conference Slamming Gov. Cuomo for Implementing Bail Reform Rollbacks and Increasing NY's Incarcerated Population***

*Advocates Demanded NY State Lawmakers Address the Incarceration Crisis and Reconvene in Albany to Pass Critical Package of Criminal Justice Reforms*

**[ZOOM RECORDING HERE](#)**

**New York -- July 2, 2020** -- State lawmakers and a coalition of racial justice, immigrant justice, and decarceration advocates hosted a press conference on the first day that the State's new bail reform rollbacks began to go into effect. The group condemned the regressive action that is projected to send thousands more people to jail and called on lawmakers to respond by halting the rollbacks and passing a five-part criminal justice bill package that will reduce the incarcerated population and begin to ameliorate other forms of racialized state violence.

In April, Cuomo and state lawmakers passed rollbacks to New York's historic 2019 bail reforms as part of the state's fiscal year 2021 budget, even as COVID-19 surged across New York. The rollbacks mean tens of thousands more legally innocent, mostly Black and Latinx New Yorkers will be detained pretrial each year.

In addition to calling for an immediate halt to the bail rollbacks, advocates gathered to call on the Governor and New York State Legislature to pass a slate of five criminal justice measures that would begin to address the full spectrum of state sanctioned violence:

- [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 most medically vulnerable incarcerated people.
- [Fair and Timely Parole](#) would provide more meaningful parole review 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.
- [Repeal Walking While Trans](#) would end the criminalization of loitering for the purposes of prostitution that disproportionately targets transgender people of color.
- The [Protect our Courts Act](#) makes it unlawful for a law enforcement officer (including Immigration and Customs Enforcement) to arrest a person for a civil violation while that person is going to, attending, or leaving court.

[The Repeal of Walking While Trans Ban](#), [HALT Solitary Act](#), and [Protect our Courts Act](#) all have more official legislative co-sponsors than the number of the votes needed to pass. These added measures would not only prevent COVID-19 from creating disaster in courts, jails, prisons, and detention facilities, but would also begin to reverse many of the damaging policies that have fueled mass criminalization, mass incarceration, and death by incarceration.

**Speakers at the press conference and digital rally said the following:**

**Marvin Mayfield, Statewide Organizer at Center for Community Alternatives, said,** “For too long, the community that identifies as law and order has harmed, assaulted, pillaged and murdered people of color. Black life and black pain does not matter to them. Bail rollbacks are nothing short of devastating for Black and Brown communities. We call on lawmakers to use every tool possible to halt these rollbacks and undue this harm.”

**Assembly Member Latrice Walker, said,** “In the face of children and families being caged across the country because of the President, we see the same thing continuing to happen on Rikers Island. These unfair rollbacks were allowed to move forward even when we all knew in our hearts that it was wrong. Mass incarceration has no place in our society anymore. We can no longer afford to miss the mark.”

**Reverend Winnie Varghese, Priest and Director of Justice and Reconciliation at Trinity Wall Street Church, said,** “Moral fights are legal fights. Bail reform could have been historic but it was instead rollback by Governor Cuomo. Cash bail greatly harms people. These are our neighbors. We must do everything we can to keep people out of jail.”

**Senator Gustavo Rivera, Chair of the Senate Health Committee, and lead sponsor of the Fair and Timely Parole Act, said,** “We still have an obligation to people in the criminal justice system. All of these bills need to pass this year. We knew we needed them before and now we need them more than ever.”

**Jose Saldana, Director of Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, said,** “We are dealing with two pandemics. One we hope to get a vaccine for soon, and the other that we, the community, must be the vaccine for. Our message to elected leaders is that they cannot just pass initial police reforms and then go home. If our elected leaders fail to act in the midst of the most significant movement for racial justice in decades, then our grandchildren will be tasked with addressing this racism at a great cost.”

**Assembly Member Carmen de la Rosa, lead sponsor of Elder Parole, said,** “The pandemic of COVID-19 and the pandemic of racism have brought injustice to the forefront. We must choose justice over political expediency. We have a responsibility to say no more. The plight of those who are behind bars right is interconnected to the plight of people experiencing police violence on the streets. The legacy of our communities is on the line.”

**TS Candii, leader of the Walking While Trans Coalition, said,** “Our lives and our existence have always been a pandemic. People don’t understand our lives so they criminalize our lives. Loitering for the purposes of prostitution has been used as a weapon to criminalize Black and brown lives. I’m fighting for my dignity to just be.

**Roger Clark, Community Leader with the #HALTsolitary campaign and VOCAL-NY, said,** “Legislators rolled back bail reform knowing that it would put more people in jail. It’s unconscionable. I’m tired of empty promises. Governor Cuomo doesn’t want to hear us on

criminal justice reform. Lawmakers need to pass the HALT Solitary Act this session and fix this entire system.”

**Dr. Robert Fullilove, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences at the Columbia University Medical Center and Associate Dean for Community and Minority Affairs, said,** “The most important thing we learn in the field of public health is to never leave a pool of infection untreated. In the United States, the largest concentration of COVID-19 is within prisons and jails. This isn’t just about incarcerated people, it’s about all of us in the community. Don’t be on the wrong side of this. Lives are at stake.”

**Jose Chapa, Senior Policy Associate at the Immigrant Defense Project, said,** “New York immigrants continue to be impacted by COVID-19 at disproportionate and alarming rates. The New York State must address racialized violence in all of its forms, and that includes protecting immigrant New Yorkers from ICE policing. This moment demands bold changes. We are calling on our leaders to imagine a different kind of world where everyone’s safety is valued.”

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