To Governor Andrew Cuomo, Acting Commissioner of the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision Anthony Annucci, and Chairwoman of the Parole Board Tina Stanford,

We are in the midst of a global pandemic of unimaginable proportions. While the world works to adjust and enact drastic measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among the public, a massive humanitarian crisis is unfolding inside New York State prisons. Of the 43,800 New Yorkers who are currently in custody, 72% are Black or Latinx, 9,500 are aged 50 and older, and 3,500 have been behind bars for more than 20 years, including 800 people who have served over 30 years.

Deplorable, unsanitary and inhumane conditions in our state correctional facilities guarantee that the spread of coronavirus will be rapid and lethal. Practices like frequent hand-washing, social distancing and self-quarantine are nearly impossible inside our prisons. We agree with the hundreds of medical and public health experts and advocates across the country: the only effective way to prevent the unending spread of COVID-19 is to release people from the confines of prison. If you do not act now, we must prepare for a catastrophic loss of life behind bars.

We write to you calling for immediate and urgent action. We do so in our capacity as legislators elected to represent New York communities and in accordance with our steadfast commitment to protect New York’s most vulnerable. We join advocates, attorneys, formerly incarcerated people and family members with loved ones in prison to urge you to act in accordance with the belief that all people have an inherent right to dignity, care and compassion, and that no person, including those who have caused harm, deserves to suffer or die behind bars of COVID-19.

You have the power to act, and to stave off the widespread harms and potential loss of life that will result from the further spread of Covid-19 in New York state prisons. Critically, doing so is consistent with safety and the welfare of all New Yorkers. Releasing people from prison, especially those who have served long sentences and are aging or elderly, strengthens families and ensures the overall well-being of our communities. It also allows our state to divert millions of dollars otherwise spent on locking people up to critical resources when our state needs them most.

WE CALL ON YOU TO JOIN US IN THIS CRITICAL MOMENT BY TAKING THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:

- **Release those who are older, medically vulnerable, parole eligible or within one year of their release date.**
- **Expedite reentry** by removing barriers to housing, expediting field investigations of residences and residential treatment programs to ensure the swift release of people from prison, and partnering with existing reentry and community-based organizations to support people released during the pandemic.
- **Supervise those released from prisons in a manner consistent with the prioritization of public health** by terminating the supervision of those who have successfully completed one year of supervision and by suspending travel restrictions, programming requirements, the enforcement of technical violations, and the use of electronic monitoring.
- **Improve the conditions inside New York State prisons** by immediately implementing measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus while respecting the dignity, physical health, mental well-being, and basic liberties of all people in prisons, including: making testing and medical treatment readily available to all; ending solitary confinement; providing free and unlimited access to phone calls, emails, and mail for communication with family members, loved ones, legal counsel, and the courts; ensuring access to supportive services; justly compensating those who provide labor to the state; and guaranteeing transparency regarding steps taken to address the danger of coronavirus and the threat of its spread.

This letter serves both as a warning for what is to come, and a plea for immediate action. The lives of thousands of vulnerable New Yorkers depend on the actions you take today.

SINCERELY,