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**\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

## **Over 40 NY State Elected Officials Call on Gov. Cuomo to Immediately Release New Yorkers From Prisons During COVID-19 Pandemic**

### ***Legislators Sent the Letter to Governor Andrew Cuomo, DOCCS Acting Commissioner Anthony Annucci, and Parole Board Chairperson Tina Stanford Demanding Swift Action To Save Lives***

**May 1 2020, New York, NY** --- 46 New York State Senators and Assembly Members signed [a letter](#) calling on Governor Cuomo to immediately release New Yorkers from state prisons who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. Specifically, the letter calls for the release of people in prison who are aging and elderly, facing health concerns, parole eligible, or within a year of their release. The letter addressed to Governor Andrew Cuomo, Acting Commissioner of the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) Anthony Annucci, and Chairwoman of the Parole Board Tina Stanford argues the only effective way to slow the deadly spread of COVID-19 is to release these people from the confines of prison.

Despite COVID-19 spreading unabated in New York State prisons, Governor Cuomo, Commissioner Annucci and Chairwoman Stanford have not taken the necessary actions to protect the state's incarcerated population. Practices like constant hand washing, social distancing and self quarantine are nearly impossible in New York jails and prisons. The only sensible step is to take bold actions towards decarceration.

"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," the letter reads.

"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."

**The letter lists out the following demands:**

**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.

**Assembly Member Joseph Lentol (AD-50), Chair of the Assembly Committee on Codes** said, “During the COVID-19 pandemic, we must do everything we can to protect New Yorkers, and that includes our most vulnerable in prison. COVID-19 is a virus that has no boundaries. It is difficult to think of any place more susceptible to the spread of COVID19 than within our prisons where we know that social distancing can be particularly difficult. These measures will go a long way to protect our vulnerable in addition to prison staff and their families. If we can save lives, we must do everything in our power to do so.”

**Assembly Member Carmen De La Rosa (AD-72)** said, “COVID-19 has decimated our communities and taken many of our loved ones here in New York State. That loss extends to those loved ones who today are trapped in our state prisons. We know that COVID-19 targets the elderly and those who have underlying conditions, this profile fits many individuals who are in prison today. We call on Governor Cuomo to use his executive clemency powers to release as many vulnerable people as he can. We cannot let COVID-19 be a death sentence, including for many who have already served their sentences or have transformed their lives.”

**State Senator Luis Sepulveda (SD-32), Chair of the Senate Committee on Crime Victims, Crime and Corrections** said, “People in correctional facilities are especially vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19. As we have been calling for since the beginning of the pandemic, it is imperative that we release as many people as possible, particularly the elderly, those with pre-existing conditions, and all those who are eligible for release. Current efforts by the Governor, DOCCS, and the parole board are important steps in the right direction, but I hope they continue to do more to ensure the safety of staff and everyone incarcerated.”

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