

## For Immediate Release

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### ***As Legislature Plans to Reconvene, Advocates Demand Passage of Urgent Legislation to Help Prevent COVID Deaths and Suffering in Prison & Correct Longstanding Injustices Exacerbating the Virus***

*Elder Parole, Fair & Timely Parole, and the HALT Solitary Confinement Act Will Reduce the Number of People in Prison who are Vulnerable to COVID-19, Limit the Spread of the Virus, and Help Ensure that People Behind Bars With Symptoms Get Treatment, Not Torture*

**(New York, NY)** -- Today, the #HALTsolitary Campaign, Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, Parole Preparation Project, and Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club released the following statement in response to news that the New York [State Senate will reconvene next Tuesday, May 26](#), and the [Assembly is planning to reconvene](#), as well:

“As New York looks toward a gradual recovery from the havoc of COVID-19, state lawmakers must not leave behind people in prison, where the virus shows no signs of letting up and is [disproportionately taking the lives of People of Color](#). That recovery must include passage of the HALT Solitary Confinement Act, Elder Parole, and Fair & Timely Parole, which together would reduce the number of people in prison who are vulnerable to COVID-19, limit the spread of the virus, and help ensure that people behind bars with symptoms get decent medical care, not torture.

To date, Governor Cuomo and the state’s overall response has hardly shown any recognition of the lives of incarcerated people and their loved ones, and the minimal steps taken were only in response to community demands. Amidst the pandemic, the Governor has granted zero clemencies and [imposed widespread use of solitary confinement](#) rather than providing true medical isolation and quarantine with high-quality treatment and care, against the urging of correctional health experts. The Senate and Assembly must rise to the occasion, stand up to the Governor’s completely inadequate COVID response, and pass life-saving legislation in the name of public health and racial justice.”

### **BACKGROUND:**

Rather than releasing vulnerable people, the state’s primary response has been to lock people in solitary confinement and lockdown entire units with no programming or visits. In fact, health experts warn that [solitary worsens the spread and impacts of COVID-19](#) by weakening people’s overall condition and immunity, by forcing contact between officers and the people in solitary they have to escort to showers or recreation in accordance with DOCCS rules, and by discouraging people from reporting symptoms because they know

they may likely end up in a SHU cell rather than receiving quality medical treatment. 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.

In addition, Governor Cuomo has issued zero clemencies. Instead, he has released less than one half of one percent of people using other, narrow mechanisms with sweeping categorical exclusions that leave behind the large majority of incarcerated people vulnerable to COVID-19. [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. These measures would not only prevent COVID-19 from creating a disaster in the prisons, but would also begin to reverse some of the damaging policies that have created mass incarceration and death by incarceration.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, at least 15 state prison systems and the federal prison system have recognized that preventing massive suffering and death behind bars necessitates significant reductions in prison populations, and have [reduced their incarcerated populations by more than one percent](#). Governors and state prison systems in Kentucky, California, Wisconsin, Utah, Maine, and Vermont, have all reduced their prison populations by more than at least four percent. [New York State prisons have more COVID cases](#), and higher rates of COVID, than all six of these states.

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