

****PRESS STATEMENT****

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Jared Chausow - jchausow@gmail.com, 650-814-0565
TeAna Taylor - taylorteana@gmail.com, 518-847-5497

ADVOCATES RESPOND TO COVID-19 DEATH OF ANOTHER INCARCERATED PERSON BY DEMANDING NY STATE LAWMAKERS PASS PAROLE JUSTICE AND #HALTSOLITARY PRISON REFORMS

TODAY: THE NUMBER OF INCARCERATED PEOPLE IN NY STATE PRISONS WHO HAVE CONTRACTED COVID-19 SINCE THE START OF THE PANDEMIC OFFICIALLY PASSED 4,000

NEW YORK -- Today, the NY State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) reported that yet another incarcerated person—at Midstate prison—died of COVID-19. This person represents the 11th incarcerated New Yorker in the state's prison system to die of COVID-19 in the last month alone—the largest-ever spike in COVID-related deaths in the New York State prison system. [DOCCS data](#) also shows that the number of incarcerated people who have contracted COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic officially surpassed 4,000 people. In response, **the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, Parole Preparation Project, Center for Community Alternatives, the #HALTsolitary Campaign, and FWD.us** released the following statement:

“Yesterday, New York State reached another terrible milestone, surpassing 4,000 COVID cases amongst incarcerated people in state prisons. On the same day, yet another person needlessly died of the virus behind bars — the eleventh such tragedy in the last month alone — this time at Midstate prison. What will it take for lawmakers to act?”

Yesterday was also the day we joined with victim and survivor advocates and hundreds of other allies across the state to launch the People's Campaign for Parole Justice demanding the passage of legislation to provide meaningful release opportunities to people in prison. The Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills, along with the HALT Solitary Confinement Act, will help end suffering and death in New York prisons and bring a sorely-needed measure of justice and relief to the tens of thousands of incarcerated New Yorkers and their families.”

BACKGROUND: The New York State prison system reported the 29th death of incarcerated people from COVID-19, this time at Midstate Correctional Facility. In the past month, 11 incarcerated people in DOCCS custody have died from the virus.

More than 2,000 incarcerated people have tested positive for COVID-19 since December 1, and on January 14th, the number of incarcerated people who have tested positive for the virus officially surpassed 4,000. There are currently outbreaks of the virus at Attica, Coxsackie, Bedford Hills, Bare Hill, Clinton, Woodbourne, Groveland, Cayuga, and Walsh Correctional Facilities.

Through nearly ten months of the pandemic so far, Governor Andrew Cuomo has granted a total of [ten clemencies](#) to New Yorkers in prison--fewer clemencies than [racist and xenophobic President Donald Trump](#) and governors in [California](#), [Illinois](#), [Oklahoma](#), [Kentucky](#), and other states across the country. Cuomo has refused to take action despite calls from [advocates, attorneys, family members of people in prison, public health experts, Members of Congress, district attorneys and philanthropists, editorial boards](#), and [high profile celebrities](#) for him to grant wide-sweeping clemencies to people in prison in response to the pandemic. Instead of granting clemencies, Governor Cuomo has condemned thousands to solitary confinement, which [only exacerbates the harm](#) and spread of COVID-19. In addition, the Governor has yet to announce when he intends to offer vaccines to incarcerated New Yorkers, falling behind [at least one Republican Governor who announced plans to vaccinate this group](#).

There are many thousands of people in New York State prisons who are eligible for parole release, aged 50 and older, or imprisoned on a non-criminal technical parole violation, and/or within a year of their release date:

- 4,022 people who are already eligible for parole release
- 3,305 people held on technical parole violation
- 8,291 people aged 50 and older
- 6,524 within a year of max/condition release (including 5 women with infants who are part of the Bedford Hills nursery program and one pregnant woman)

Advocates have called for lawmakers in Albany to pass three bills that will address this pandemic and prevent similar tragedies in the future:

- [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.

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