

**New York State Prisoner Justice Network
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TO the NYS Board of Parole:

The New York State Prisoner Justice Network represents organizations throughout the state of New York which advocate for more just, transparent, accountable, and effective criminal justice policies. As incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, advocates, and families affected by incarceration, we have seen firsthand that the policies of revenge-driven punishment implemented by the Parole Board are harming our families and communities by keeping people incarcerated who are manifestly no danger to us or our neighbors, and instead are potential positive contributors to our communities.

The policy that most exemplifies this problem is the Parole Board's repeated denials of parole based on the seriousness of the offense committed decades earlier, for which the parole applicant has completed her or his minimum sentence. It appears that the Board believes that the seriousness of the offense is a risk factor for recidivism. This intuitively "obvious" belief is contradicted by research showing that people age out of crime and that a serious offense, per se, is not a risk factor after the person's sentence has been served. If this is the case, thousands of parole applicants denied on the basis of their crime of conviction are serving tens of thousands of unnecessary years in prison.

The single change to the regulations that would change this cruel and wasteful policy would be a clear statement that the seriousness of the crime cannot be considered a risk factor beyond the weight already accorded to it by the COMPAS score. This would be consistent with the letter and intent of the legislative law which insists on risk and needs principles as the basis for the Board's decision-making: not risk and needs as subjectively interpreted by individual board members guided by their own and pressure groups' philosophies of punishment, but risk and needs principles proven by objective research.

Parole Board Chairwoman Stanford stated at the Board's videotaped August business meeting that the public is in need of better explanations for why the Board makes the decisions it makes. The problem is not that we, the public, do not understand the Board's decisions. It is that a large and growing segment of the people of New York State, including a number of judges, legislators, and faith leaders, are outraged by the Board's decisions and by the underlying premise of revenge and permanent punishment they reveal. Better explanations will not satisfy us; we are looking for better decisions. We want those decisions to be based on objective, forward-focused criteria measuring rehabilitation and community safety, not on political pressure, outdated assumptions, and thirst for retribution.

Sincerely, The New York State Prisoner Justice Network