

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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In Response to First Incarcerated Person with COVID-19 Dying in NY State Prison System, Advocates Hold Press Conference and Vigil Outside Sing Sing Prison to Call on Gov. Cuomo to Grant Emergency Clemencies

The Group Called on Gov. Cuomo to Grant Emergency Clemencies to Incarcerated Older Adults and Other Immune Compromised People in Prison

Ossining, New York—April 3, 2020—Today, family members of incarcerated people, community leaders, and criminal justice advocates from the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, Parole Preparation Project, VOCAL-NY, and Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club gathered outside Sing Sing Correctional Facility for a press conference and vigil to call on Governor Cuomo to grant emergency clemencies to older people and others in prison with compromised immune systems who are vulnerable to COVID-19.

The group gathered in response to the death of a person incarcerated at Sing Sing Correctional Facility who tested positive for COVID-19—the first incarcerated person with the virus to die in a New York State prison. On March 30, Juan Mosquero died in isolation at Sing Sing Correctional Facility with flu-like symptoms. He was 58 years old. On April 2, an employee at the Westchester County Medical Center told the Gothamist that Mr. Mosquero [tested positive for COVID-19](#), something that many [people in prison suspected](#) for weeks.

The group gathered to mourn the death of Mr. Mosquero and called for no more deaths in prison. They held a short press conference and vigil with appropriate social distancing, calling on the governor to grant clemencies to thousands of older adults and other immune-compromised New Yorkers before more people in prison contract the virus and die. The group ended the gathering with a noise demonstration that dozens of community members participated in using their car horns and noisemakers.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, 24 incarcerated people and 176 staff in New York State prisons have tested positive for the virus. Positive tests have occurred in at least 10 of the state's 52 facilities. One prison employee has already died from COVID-19. Despite calls from [advocates](#), [attorneys](#), [family members of people in prison](#), [public health experts](#), [Members of Congress](#), [district attorneys and philanthropists](#) for the state to release people from prison in response to the virus, the Governor has yet to issue a single clemency since the pandemic began. There are 10,239 older adults (aged 50 and older) incarcerated in New York State prisons.

Jose Saldana, Director of the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, who served 38 years in prison said, “Juan Mosquero was 58 years old when he died. That’s relatively young. Since Governor Cuomo took office, over 675 older men and women have died in his prisons. The vast majority of them were People of Color. The average age at death was 58 years old. This is a humanitarian crisis. If Governor Cuomo fails to act, he has, in effect, transformed his prisons into death camps.”

Ivan Calaff, who was released from Sing Sing Correctional Facility in 2018 after serving nearly 20 years behind bars said, “I knew Juan. He was a quiet guy. We worked in the law library together. He didn’t deserve this. We need political leaders who are willing to do the right thing. We don’t have the luxury of time. Cuomo, do the right thing. We need you on this.”

Jolene Russ, whose husband is currently incarcerated in a New York State prison said, “In every press conference, Governor Cuomo talks about how he cares for New Yorkers, how they need information, how we have to reduce density, and how we have to test. But he is not doing that for our loved ones in prison. My husband is in there. There are 6,500 clemency applications in Cuomo’s Clemency Bureau right now. We need clemency now. Let our people go.”

Roger Clark, Community Leader with VOCAL-NY who was previously incarcerated at Sing Sing Correctional Facility said, “For years, the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign has been calling on Cuomo to release the elders, and for good reason. Even before this pandemic, they were dying in prison. For over a month, we’ve been ringing the alarm for jails and prison to release people who are vulnerable. One death is too much. We’re calling on Cuomo to please stop the carnage. Release these people.”

Anthony Dixon, Director of Community Engagement with the Parole Preparation Project said, “Governor Cuomo allowed, without granting clemency, for this to happen. How many more need to die in New York State prisons? Why are we playing Russian roulette with elderly people who are not sentenced to death? This virus is the death penalty for elderly people. Not on our watch.”

Thomas Kearney, Community Organizer with the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, who served time at Sing Sing Correctional Facility said, “Granting clemency to the elderly, the infirm, and those who are susceptible to this COVID-19 virus is not a free pass or get out of jail free card. Clemency is compassion. Governor Cuomo, show that you have some compassion, and let our elders go.”

Allen Roskoff, President of Jim Owles Liberal Club said, “The elderly and the infirm who are serving time should have been released before this pandemic. Governor Cuomo, you have been leading the nation with your press conferences, but you have been falling short when it comes to people who are incarcerated. The prisons throughout this state are petri dishes. People cannot be separated. They eat together, shower together, and sleep near each other. We’re

talking about the elderly, grandmothers, grandfathers, and people with loved ones at home.
Governor Cuomo, send them home.

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