

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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ADVOCATES MOURN ANOTHER INCARCERATED PERSON DEAD OF COVID-19, IN WENDE PRISON, AMID RISING PRISON DEATH TOLL, RENEW CALL FOR EMERGENCY ACTION

FOUR INCARCERATED PEOPLE HAVE DIED OF COVID-19 IN NY STATE PRISONS IN LAST TWO WEEKS AMID COVID SURGE

NEW YORK -- Today, the NY State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision reported that [an incarcerated person at Wende prison died](#) of COVID-19. That is the fourth incarcerated person in NY State prisons to die of COVID-19 in the last two weeks. In response, **the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, Parole Preparation Project, and the #HALTsolitary Campaign** released the following statement:

“As many New Yorkers prepare to mark the new year, yet another family and community are grieving because a person in New York’s Wende prison has needlessly died of COVID-19. This is the fourth such death in a New York State prison in just the last two weeks. We mourn this loss and we hold in our hearts all who continue to languish behind bars, as well as their families and other loved ones. With COVID-19 infecting more than a thousand incarcerated New Yorkers in the last month, Governor Cuomo can no longer deny the urgency of the health crisis exploding in New York’s prison system. People in prisons cannot socially distance, the staff cycle in and out of the facilities daily, and PPE behind bars is scarce at best. He must grant life-saving clemencies to vulnerable people and reduce the prison population today. In addition, the legislature must pass COVID-related reforms, including the Elder Parole bill, Fair and Timely Parole Act, and the HALT Solitary Confinement Act to prevent more needless deaths behind bars.”

BACKGROUND: The New York State prison system reported the 22nd death of an incarcerated person, this time at Wende Correctional Facility, on December 30, 2020. DOCCS previously reported that an incarcerated person died of COVID-19 at Wende on December 29, another at Clinton Correctional Facility on December 22nd, and another at Woodbourne Correctional Facility on December 17.

Since December 1, 1,173 incarcerated people have tested positive for COVID-19. There are currently outbreaks of the virus at Attica, Bedford Hills, Bare Hill, Clinton, Woodbourne, Groveland, Cayuga, and Walsh Correctional Facilities.

Amid the pandemic, Governor Andrew Cuomo has granted a total of [ten clemencies](#) to New Yorkers in prison--fewer clemencies than [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 virus. Instead of granting clemencies, Governor Cuomo has condemned thousands to solitary confinement, which [only exacerbates the harm](#) and spread of COVID-19.

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 also called for lawmakers in Albany to pass three bills amid the pandemic:

- [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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