

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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See Zoom press conference recording beginning at: 38:20:

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Advocates Hold Statewide Day of Action Outside State Prisons and Governor's Mansion Calling on Gov. Cuomo to Grant Mass Clemencies to Incarcerated New Yorkers Vulnerable to COVID-19

The Groups Rallied Behind the Message: Prisons + COVID-19 = Death and Called for the Immediate Release of Vulnerable New Yorkers in Prison

New York – April 21, 2020 – A coalition of advocates and community members hosted a coordinated statewide virtual press conference, socially distant noise demonstrations, and car caravans outside two state prisons and the Governor's mansion to call on Governor Cuomo to grant immediate clemencies to incarcerated New Yorkers vulnerable to COVID-19. The press conference featured speakers impacted by both [Otisville and Bedford Hills Correctional Facilities](#), which house high numbers of older and pregnant people, and others who are vulnerable to COVID-19.

On March 30, Juan Mosquero died in isolation at Sing Sing Correctional Facility--he was the first incarcerated person to die in New York State prisons with COVID-19. Since Mr. Mosquero's death, at least four other New Yorkers incarcerated in the state prison system have died with the virus. To date, 219 incarcerated people and 813 staff in the state prison system have tested positive for the virus.

Despite calls from [advocates, attorneys, family members of people in prison, public health experts, Members of Congress, district attorneys and philanthropists](#), and [high profile celebrities](#) for the state to release large numbers of people from prison in response to the virus, the Governor has yet to issue a single clemency since the pandemic began. Governors in Kentucky, Illinois, Oklahoma, and California have all issued clemencies to people in their state prison systems since the virus began. New York State's prison system identified a small number of incarcerated [older people within 90 days of the end of their sentence](#) for early release. Advocates opposed the measure, saying it [didn't go nearly far enough](#). There are currently 9,500 older adults in New York State prisons.

Jolene Russ, whose husband is currently incarcerated in a New York State prison and who spoke outside Governor Cuomo's mansion said, "Governor Cuomo keeps saying we can't go back to how things were before COVID-19. Yes, we need to return to a decarcerated state, to a

parole process that looks at who people are today, and doesn't keep them in cages forever. Our prisons have become nursing homes."

TeAna Taylor, whose father is currently incarcerated in a New York State prison and spoke outside of Governor Cuomo's mansion said, "I'm worried about my father. I'm worried that the prisons don't have proper sanitary measures. My father has been in prison for 15 years. He is a changed man. He did not get sentenced to death. Free our parents. They have loved ones to go home to who will take care of them."

Anthony Dixon, Director of Community Engagement with the Parole Preparation Project, who served 32 years in prison said, "Otisville Correctional Facility has one of the oldest prison populations in New York State. This is the next hot spot. I hope that doesn't happen, but everything we are seeing right now indicates that death looms over New York State prisons."

Mark Shervington, Community Organizer with the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, who spent 29 years in prison and spoke outside Otisville Correctional Facility, where he was previously incarcerated said, "I survived other public health crises while incarcerated here, and I know proper protective measures are not happening. Governor Cuomo, this is a public health emergency."

Latisha Morris, spoke outside Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, where she was previously incarcerated and said, "Shame on you, Governor Cuomo. Grant clemency, not to one but to all. When are you going to answer the call? This is cruel and unusual punishment. We are outside Bedford Hills where there's a nursery. There are loved ones inside. Cuomo, let them go."

Donna Robinson, Community Organizer with the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign said, "Bedford Hills is near and dear to my heart. My daughter is incarcerated at Bedford Hills. My daughter didn't sign up for a death sentence. She was sentenced to 15 years to life. Send her back home."

Allen Roskoff, President of Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club, who joined the rally outside of Bedford Hills said, "Governor Cuomo needs a heart. The Governor has ignored what's going on in our prisons. The imperial governor is allowing prisons to become the petri dishes of this virus. He is giving people a death sentence. The blood is going to be on his hands."

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