

STATEMENT: Following COVID Death at NY Women's Prison, Advocates Demand Reforms

**\*\*PRESS STATEMENT\*\***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

January 22, 2021

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**FOLLOWING ANOTHER COVID-19 DEATH AT BEDFORD HILLS  
PRISON FOR WOMEN, ADVOCATES DEMAND NY STATE  
LAWMAKERS PASS PAROLE JUSTICE & #HALTsolitary REFORMS**

**THE INCARCERATED PERSON WHO DIED AT BEDFORD HILLS WAS  
30TH TO DIE OF COVID-19 BEHIND BARS IN NY STATE PRISONS**

**WITH VACCINE ROLLOUT HAMPERED BY BUREAUCRATIC CHAOS &  
LIMITED SUPPLY, RELEASING VULNERABLE INCARCERATED  
PEOPLE IS URGENT TO SAVE LIVES**

**NEW YORK** -- Today, the NY State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) reported that yet another incarcerated person—at Bedford Hills prison for women—died of COVID-19. This person represents the 12th incarcerated New Yorker in the state’s prison system to die of COVID-19 in the past five weeks—the largest-ever spike in COVID-related deaths in the New York State prison system—and the 30th known COVID-related death in a New York prison. [DOCCS data](#) also reflects the number of incarcerated people who have contracted COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic officially surpassed 4,500 people. In response, **New Hour for Women and Children- LI, the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, Parole Preparation Project, Center for Community Alternatives, the #HALTsolitary Campaign, and FWD.us** released the following statement:

*“We are heartbroken to release statement after statement conveying the dire and ever-growing COVID crisis behind bars. Today, the Cuomo administration is announcing yet another death, this time at the women’s Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, with no commitment to protect incarcerated women—including mothers with their infants housed at the facility. Any other agency with DOCCS’ deplorable track record of death, despair, brutality and racism, even before the pandemic, would have faced demands for the resignation of its leadership. Yet, in this case, the fault lies with Governor Cuomo himself. He has failed to release vulnerable people and others who should be safely reunited with their families right now. He is refusing to provide incarcerated New Yorkers access to the COVID-19 vaccine.*”

*We grieve with those mourning lost loved ones and we urge this moment of sadness to inspire swift action by the legislature to prevent future preventable deaths. They must pass the Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills, along with the HALT Solitary Confinement Act, to help end suffering and death in New York prisons and deliver hope to the tens of thousands of incarcerated New Yorkers and their families.”*

**BACKGROUND:** The New York State prison system reported the 30th death of incarcerated people from COVID-19, this time at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. In the past month, 12 incarcerated people in DOCCS custody have died from the virus.

More than 2,700 incarcerated people have tested positive for COVID-19 since December 1, and the number of incarcerated people who have tested positive for the virus has officially surpassed 4,500. There are currently outbreaks of the virus at Attica, Coxsackie, Bedford Hills, Bare Hill, Clinton, Woodbourne, Wyoming, Wende, 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 former 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 eight other states that are vaccinating this group](#) and President Biden, who announced his intentions to vaccinate incarcerated people.

The Cuomo Administration has, to date, excluded predominately Black and brown incarcerated people from eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine while predominantly white prison staff are currently eligible.

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:

- 4,786 people who are already eligible for parole release
- 3,305 people held on technical parole violation
- 8,291 people aged 50 and older
- 7,955 within a year of max/conditional release (including 5 incarcerated mothers with infants housed in the Bedford Hills Corr. Facility nursery and one pregnant woman)

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

- [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 and community ready.
- 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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