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**\*\*\*STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\*\***

## **Advocates Respond to Governor Cuomo's Ban on Prison Visits in Wake of Coronavirus**

**(New York, NY) The Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, Parole Preparation Project, VOCAL-NY, Worth Rises, Citizen Action of NY, the #HALTsolitary Campaign and Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club** released the following statement in response to Governor Cuomo's ban on prison visits through April 11 in the wake of the Coronavirus:

“We fundamentally value public health during this serious time and recognize that as a society we are only as safe as our most vulnerable populations. That's why we support measures that advance comprehensive and holistic public health for all New Yorkers, including those behind bars.

We are outraged that the only two actions Governor Cuomo has taken for incarcerated people since the outbreak of the Coronavirus are forcing incarcerated people to make hand sanitizer for slave wages, and keeping families apart with a blanket ban on visiting through April 11.

Rather than responding to this crisis with interventions focused solely upon punishment and degradation, Governor Cuomo should immediately take steps to protect incarcerated New Yorkers and keep families together. Instead of a blanket ban on visits, DOCCS should implement a comprehensive plan that actually protects health and safety. The governor needs to immediately grant clemencies to New Yorkers in prison who are particularly vulnerable to contracting the virus, including older people, pregnant people, and others with compromised immune systems who are at high risk. In addition to releasing vulnerable people, he must ensure that all New Yorkers in prison have free and unlimited access to cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting supplies and products, including soap and water, as well as access to daily showers and laundry.

The reality is that staff cycling in and out of the facility present risks comparable to those posed by visitors and we have heard no plans to even screen them. Visits serve as a lifeline to incarcerated people and their families. Banning visits must be an absolute last resort. Any visit ban should be routinely reevaluated and visiting should be reinstated as soon as public health and safety standards permit. Phone calls, stamps, and tablets for the purposes of communicating with family, loved ones, and attorneys should be completely free of charge. If the governor cares at all about New Yorkers in prison, then he must take these critical actions immediately.”

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