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*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

***In Wake of Another In-Prison Death, Advocates and Community Leaders
Unearth Prison Horrors in Second Briefing on COVID-19 Crisis in New York State Prisons***

***Groups Continue Calls for Gov. Cuomo to Grant Emergency Clemencies and
For Parole Board and State Prison System to Adopt Community Demands***

(New York, NY) – The Release Aging People in Prison Campaign and Parole Preparation Project issued the following statement in conjunction with their second briefing on COVID-19 in New York State prisons as the Coronavirus harms record numbers of incarcerated New Yorkers:

“Despite calls from public health experts, faith leaders, legal and law enforcement organizations, and elected officials at all levels of government, Governor Cuomo has yet to take any action to release New Yorkers from prison in the wake of COVID-19. Every day, the number of people in prison who test positive for the virus climbs higher. More people are dying and thousands of incarcerated older people and others with compromised immune systems are at serious risk of death by this virus if the Governor doesn’t take swift and immediate action. We call on the Governor to grant clemency now, before it’s too late.”

BRIEFING UPDATES: The Release Aging People in Prison Campaign (RAPP) and the Parole Preparation Project (PPP) have continued to consolidate reports on conditions in New York State prisons. These reports come from advocates, attorneys, loved ones of incarcerated people, and direct correspondence with people in prison. The reports document the absence of effective preventive measures within the state’s prisons, making it certain that the Coronavirus will spread unchecked behind bars. The reports confirm the pervasiveness of toxic conditions, and thus necessitate immediate implementation of RAPP’s and PPP’s list of demands to prevent the lethal spread of COVID-19 in prison. These reports underscore an abysmal lack of medical attention, hygiene products, adequate cleaning protocol, and more.

COVID-19 Cases by the Numbers:

- The Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) is reporting a total of 552 infections among staff, and 131 among incarcerated people. One staff member and three incarcerated people have died to date.
- Advocates believe the infection rate is much higher among incarcerated people and that DOCCS is under-testing and/or under-reporting the total. Advocates report that according to their tally, more than 400 incarcerated people are currently sick with COVID-19.

Unsanitary Conditions:

- While DOCCS recently issued a memo allowing incarcerated people to use the hand sanitizer made by incarcerated people, people in several facilities report that they have no access to the sanitizer.
- Incarcerated people report that they are most commonly given small amounts of diluted bleach to clean their cells and living areas.
- Individuals who attempt to clean their cells with detergent have been written up.
- On April 9, DOCCS issued a memo that allows incarcerated people to wear masks out of state-issued handkerchiefs, and allows incarcerated people in quarantined housing units to wear surgical masks.
- Until late last week, some facilities were prohibiting masks and face coverings, while other facilities were issuing disciplinary tickets to those who did *not* cover their faces.

Quarantine Conditions:

- Many facilities are quarantining entire cell blocks and living areas for those who have COVID-19 or flu-like symptoms.
- Quarantined areas often include people without flu-like symptoms, jeopardizing the health of people who are not sick.
- Quarantined areas are often completely unavoidable for incarcerated people who either live next to or have to walk directly by the quarantined areas.

Improper Medical Care:

- Many facilities have stopped providing non-COVID related medical care altogether.
- Because of staffing shortages, “sick call” has been cancelled in many facilities and people have stopped receiving their regular medications.
- One person was denied asthma medication by a facility.
- Many who still have access to medication are scared to leave their cells to retrieve it.

Unsafe Housing:

- Dormitories are over capacity, and people are forced to sleep in bunk beds only three feet away from each other.
- People with COVID-19 symptoms are being housed in blocks and dorms with others who do not yet have any symptoms.

Inhumane Forced Labor Practices:

- Great Meadow, Albion, and Shawangunk Correctional Facilities are forcing dozens of people in prison to produce New York’s hand sanitizer for less than \$1 per hour.
- Incarcerated people are organized into 2 groups of workers. Each group works one 12-hour shift so the soap shop operates 24 hours per day.
- People are still not being provided latex gloves or masks while working.
- Individuals who refuse to work with someone exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms are written up.
- People are now forced to make masks for hospitals, while still being denied their own masks and even written up for wearing them.

- One facility is allowing civilian tours of up to 80 people to observe the production of hand sanitizer.

Violations of Human Rights:

- Facilities are blocking emails from people inside reporting on the conditions in the jails.
- Corrections Officers are forcing individuals to gather in large groups, denying cell clean up, and laughing and mocking incarcerated individuals while engaging in behavior that is putting them at risk.

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