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****PRESS RELEASE****

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IN HONOR OF OLDER AMERICANS MONTH, COALITION OF TOP AGING EXPERTS HOST VIRTUAL PRESS CONFERENCE BACKING PAROLE REFORM AS SENIOR ISSUE

FMR. NYC AGING COMMISSIONER, NY ASSEMBLY AGING COMMITTEE CHAIR RON KIM & OTHER EXPERTS GATHER AS PART OF 'PAROLE JUSTICE IS ELDER JUSTICE' ADVOCACY DAY TO HIGHLIGHT THE URGENCY OF PASSING ELDER PAROLE AND FAIR & TIMELY PAROLE BILLS

(NEW YORK) – Today, in honor of Older Americans Month, leading advocates for seniors joined families impacted by mass incarceration and NY Assembly Aging Committee Chair Ron T. Kim in a virtual press conference highlighting the need to pass the Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills to protect the rights and well-being of seniors. The press conference was part of a *Parole Justice is Elder Justice: Demanding Dignity, Health & Freedom for Older New Yorkers* advocacy day organized by Caring Across Generations, LiveOn NY, Jewish Association Serving the Aging (JASA), SAGE & others along with the People’s Campaign for Parole Justice.

New York State Assembly Member and Chair of the Aging Committee Ron T. Kim said, “We’re at a point when there is absolutely no ethical, good, or moral argument to defend the status quo of keeping our older adults in prison when they pose no threat whatsoever to our society...We have agencies who are ready to invest in people who are rejoining our community, which is still just a fraction of the money we would spend as a government to keep them in prison. Simply put, we must make a choice: continue to spend money to dehumanize people, particularly Black and brown men, or invest in people and recognize that we as a society failed them. The Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills are especially important because they will confront the ageist culture that has dominated our society. I hope that our leadership is listening so that we can get this done in the coming weeks.”

TeAna Taylor, Policy and Communications Associate with the People’s Campaign for Parole Justice and the daughter of an incarcerated New Yorker, said, “Today we are here in honor of Older Americans Month for a Parole Justice is Elder Justice virtual advocacy day to demand dignity, good health, and a chance at freedom for older New Yorkers. We are here to demand the passage of the Fair & Timely Parole and Elder Parole bills. Together these bills would give people in prison hope. They would give people meaningful opportunities for individualized parole release consideration based on who they are today and what they’ve done to change. They would reunite families across this state. We advocate for these bills because we understand each person’s humanity and ability to transform their lives. We understand that

revenge and perpetual punishment do not equal justice and do not increase safety for our communities.”

Jose Saldana, Director of the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign/RAPP, said, “When I left prison a little over three years ago, I left a lot of elders behind. One of the people I left behind died just last week. He was 67 years old and had been in prison roughly 30 years. He was waiting to return back to his family. Since I've been home, just about all the men who have died in prison, I had a personal relationship with. There's no other solution to this crisis. We have to address this through the Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills.”

Dr. Lilliam Barrios-Paoli, Sr. Advisory to President of Hunter College and former Commissioner of the NYC Department for the Aging, said: “We know from empirical research that older people in prison are the least likely to commit another crime after being released, yet under the current system thousands are languishing behind bars without hope – and at a terrible cost to families across New York and to our state coffers. The Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills should be passed this session. It is the right and humane thing to do.”

“Prison accelerates aging. We need to release people young enough to rebuild their lives and, for those already aged, we need to release them, too, so they can live the rest of their lives with dignity, humanity, and care among the family and friends who support them. This is why Hunter College’s Brookdale Center on Healthy Aging strongly supports the Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole bills,” said **Ruth K. Finkelstein, ScD, Rose Dobrof Executive Director of the Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging at Hunter College and a leader with the LiveOn NY Coalition**.

“JASA stands firmly in solidarity with the broad coalition of leaders, organizations, advocates, and others who seek to pass the Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole Bills. JASA’s work with older New Yorkers from all backgrounds is built on the belief that with support, all older adults can be vital members of society and contributors to building strong communities. Older adults who have served their time deserve to be given this opportunity, too,” said **Alan Cohen, Chief Program Officer for Congregate, Care, and Behavioral Services at JASA**.

Ifetayo Harvey, with Caring Across Generations, said, “At the age of 4, my father was sentenced to 15 years in prison. Here in New York, there are thousands of elders in our prisons who desperately need help. This is why Caring Across Generations supports the People's Campaign for Parole Justice. We are spending millions to keep older people locked up who pose no risk to public safety. We need to expand parole eligibility through Elder Parole and make the process more fair through Fair & Timely Parole.”

Dr. Brie Williams, a geriatrician at UCSF & national expert on aging in prison, said, “Prisons throughout the nation, and particularly in New York, have transformed into nursing homes and failure to intervene to reverse this process will result in even more debilitated people with costly medical conditions, alongside a rapid increase in death behind bars. New York can become a national leader by passing the Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills. New York is a state with low parole rates that doles out very lengthy sentences, and this combined has ballooned the number of older adults in prison. Prisons were not built to house older adults, who by the way have the lowest recidivism rates of any group. Studies show that the aging for people in prison is often accelerated, so a 55 year-old in prison often has the medical needs of a 70 year-

old who is not in prison. For every one year someone spends in prison, their life expectancy is reduced by two years. What are we doing? It's time for change.”

BACKGROUND: With roughly 9,000 New Yorkers serving life sentences, our state ranks among the harshest in the nation, surpassing states like Texas and Georgia. 3,500 New Yorkers in state prisons have already served 20 years. Some were as young as 15 when they went to prison. Roughly one-quarter are older adults (age 50 or older), suffering the ill effects of accelerated aging in a highly stressful environment with poor food and medical care. More than 1,000 people have already died in prison under Gov. Cuomo. Nearly 1,000 more have no hope of being released, no matter what they have accomplished and how they have changed while behind bars. They will die in custody – unless we pass Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole.

The People’s Campaign for Parole Justice is a statewide, grassroots campaign pushing for parole reform in New York State. The campaign platform is supported by more than 300 organizations across New York State and led by a coalition of the state’s biggest and most influential social justice and criminal justice groups, including the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, Parole Preparation Project, VOCAL-NY, Citizen Action, New Hour for Women and Children, Crime Victims Treatment Center, NY Communities for Change, Center for Community Alternatives, Capitol Area Against Mass Incarceration, Osborne Association, NYCLU, [FWD.us](https://www.fwd.us), #HALTsolitary Campaign, Legal Aid Society, Center for Justice at Columbia, CUNY Law Defenders Clinic, and NYU Law's Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law. The campaign is backed by some of the largest crime victims and survivor advocacy groups due to [the connections between parole justice and survivor justice](#).

Racism infects the parole release system just as it does every element of the criminal legal system. A white person in a New York prison is significantly more likely on average to be released on parole than a Black or Latinx person and the disparity widened in 2020, according to a [Times Union analysis](#) of the nearly 19,000 parole board decisions over the last two years. The data, which spans October 2018 through October 2020, shows the Parole Board granted parole release to 41 percent of white people, compared to 34 percent of Black people and 33 percent of Latinx people. Importantly, these racial disparities are not new. In 2016, the [New York Times conducted an investigation](#) of parole release data and similarly found Black and Latinx people were significantly less likely to be released than their white counterparts.

The People’s Campaign for Parole Justice is calling on lawmakers in Albany to pass two bills that will address this pandemic behind bars and prevent similar tragedies in the future:

- [Elder Parole \(S.15A/A.3475\)](#) 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 \(S.1415/A.4231\)](#) would provide more meaningful parole reviews for incarcerated people who are already parole eligible.

The Campaign is also calling on Governor Cuomo to fully staff the Parole Board with 19 Commissioners who come from communities that have been directly affected by mass incarceration and who have professional and clinical backgrounds in areas such as social work, nursing, reentry services, and other fields that allow them to evaluate incarcerated people for who they are today. The Board currently has three vacancies.

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