

MEDIA ADVISORY

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**Statement from Release Aging People in Prison Campaign and Parole Preparation Project:
Parole Justice Takes Steps Forward but More is Urgently Needed**

As the 2019 New York State legislative session ends, the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign and Parole Preparation Project are both proud of our progress this year and outraged by the remaining injustice.

Our campaign's [efforts](#) to fully staff the State Parole Board with commissioners from therapeutic and rehabilitative backgrounds culminated on June 20th after long and contentious [Senate confirmation hearings](#). Last week, Governor Cuomo sent the names of [six new parole board appointments](#) to the State Senate for confirmation. The list included a former prosecutor, nonprofit executive, pastor, former public defender, and current and former parole officers.

Among the nominees, our most serious reservations came from the appointment of Richard Kratzenberg, a former corrections officer and life-long Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) employee. According to public records, Kratzenberg was also formerly a registered Republican (now party unaffiliated) and predominantly lived in conservative, rural and suburban towns in upstate New York. Further, in his confirmation interviews with Senators, he repeatedly conveyed an archaic belief that a person's crime of conviction—and not their record of rehabilitation or transformation—should be the primary factor when making parole release determinations.

Due to fierce opposition from the advocacy community and lawmakers who had questioned Mr. Kratzenberg in committee, his appointment was never brought to the Senate floor for a vote, ending his potential nomination to the Board. The larger Senate confirmed five of the six Parole Board appointments during the final hours of the 2019 legislative session.

While we are pleased to know that the freedom of thousands of New Yorkers won't lie in the hands of Mr. Kratzenberg, we were deeply disturbed by the lack of transparency in the appointment and confirmation process, and the governor's disregard for the basic requests of advocates, currently and formerly incarcerated people and their loved ones.

Three of the six appointments came from prosecutorial or law enforcement backgrounds, and few had professional experience in trauma-informed care or other therapeutic work. Furthermore, this year's Parole Board appointments became public only through the [media](#)—less than 24 hours before the Senate's first confirmation hearing. There was little time for directly-impacted people and other advocates to investigate these candidates and determine their suitability for this powerful role.

Sadly, the state legislature also did not pass a single piece of legislation this session to improve or expand the parole release process. The governor and legislature failed countless New Yorkers and are complicit in the aging and despair of thousands of people in prison. In January 2020, state lawmakers must return to Albany with the will to bring parole justice for all. They must prioritize and pass Fair and Timely Parole (S.497) and Elder Parole (S.2144), add more Commissioners to the Parole Board who truly embrace redemption, and ensure that all incarcerated people have a fair and meaningful opportunity for release. Anything less is unacceptable.

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