

**For Immediate Release**

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**As Legislature Plans to Reconvene, Advocates Held Virtually-Connected Rallies Outside Assembly and Senate Leaders' Offices & Queensboro Correctional Facility Demanding New York's COVID-19 Response Include People in Prison**

*Passing Elder Parole, Fair & Timely Parole, and the HALT Solitary Confinement Act Will Reduce the Number of People in Prison who are Vulnerable to COVID-19, Limit the Spread of the Virus, and Help Ensure that People Behind Bars With Symptoms Get Treatment, Not Torture*

**\*\*Zoom recording [here](#); Password: 7Z+2b?%@\*\***

*Advocates & Bronx residents gathered outside Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie's Office*

**(New York, NY) -- Today, family members with currently incarcerated loved ones, formerly incarcerated community leaders, and representatives from the Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP) Campaign, the #HALTsolitary Campaign, Parole Preparation Project, VOCAL-NY, Center for Community Alternatives, Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club, and other community-based organizations** gathered at a distance and wearing masks outside the offices of Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie as well as Queensboro Prison to demand New York's COVID-19 response include people in prison.

Speakers at the coordinated speakout and press conference highlighted the indifferent and inadequate response of Governor Cuomo to the humanitarian crisis unfolding in his prisons and demanded the Legislature take action on behalf of their incarcerated constituents and their loved ones when they reconvene session, including by passing Elder Parole ([S2144/A9040](#)), Fair and Timely Parole ([S497A/A4346](#)), and the HALT Solitary Confinement Act ([S1623/A2500](#)).

*Advocates and Westchester County residents gathered outside Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins' Office*

**Cynthia Carter-Young, whose brother Leonard Carter died with COVID-19 at Queensboro Correctional Facility just weeks before his scheduled release, said,** "My beloved brother was murdered by Andrew Cuomo and the New York State prison system. This was systematic murder. He shouldn't have died. He completed his sentence. He was paroled. He was 60 years old. He was a human being."

**Nawanna Snipe-Tucker, leader with the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, whose husband has served 32 years in New York State prisons, said,** “My husband has served 32 years of a 35 year sentence. He first went to prison when he was 23 years old. Please, legislators, go back and do the right thing. Cuomo has not granted any clemencies. There are people dying inside prisons. My husband is in a prison dorm with over 50 men. There is no social distancing. Please, let them go.

**Roger Clark, community leader with VOCAL-NY, the #HALTsolitary Campaign and survivor of solitary confinement, said,** “Our communities are hurting. There are no communities hurting more than Black and Brown communities. We’ve been suffering for years. Throughout this COVID-19 crisis, our families are dying right before our eyes, and Cuomo isn’t doing anything. I’m calling upon our legislators to please pass the bills needed for us to live freely and humanely in New York State.”

**Anisah Sabur, Bronx resident, leader with the #HALTsolitary Campaign and a survivor of solitary confinement, said,** “Rather than release people to stop the spread of the virus, our state has thrown people in solitary confinement and locked down entire units. It is time that we end these barbaric practices and pass meaningful legislation so that our people can stop dying; they were not sentenced to die in New York State prisons. We demand that the legislature return immediately to pass this important legislation that would begin to save the lives of our people.”

**Aloha Powell, Bronx resident and leader with the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, whose loved one is serving a life without parole sentence in New York State prisons, said,** “Our relatives behind bars are suffering. People in prisons are extensions of our family. Our people are separated by bars but they’re not separated by love. Governor Cuomo is not taking care of the People of the State of New York. We’re his constituents. We want action now.”

**Jerome Wright, Western New York Community Organizer with the #HALTsolitary Campaign, Buffalo resident and a survivor of solitary confinement, said,** “We are here today to highlight the indifferent and inadequate response that Governor Cuomo has had to this humanitarian crisis that is unfolding in our prisons. Passing Elder Parole, Fair and Timely Parole, and the HALT Solitary Confinement Act will undoubtedly reduce the number of people in prison who are vulnerable to COVID-19, limit the spread of the virus, and help ensure that people in prison get treatment, not torture. It’s time for legislators to stop playing politics with our people.”

**Marvin Mayfield, Community Organizer with the Center for Community Alternatives, said,** “The only way to stop the virus of this virus is to reduce the number of people who are incarcerated. No one should die in prison. No one.

**BACKGROUND:** [Data](#) reported in the Daily News shows a threefold spike in deaths in New York State prisons during this COVID outbreak. 81% of those who died since the first COVID death in New York State prisons on March 30th were People of Color and 60% were Black people. This data tragically illustrates the interconnectedness of policy failures underlying both the racial disparities in the broader community and mass incarceration.

Rather than releasing vulnerable people, the state's primary response has been to lock people in solitary confinement and lockdown entire units with no programming or visits. In fact, health experts warn that [solitary worsens the spread and impacts of COVID-19](#) by weakening people's overall condition and immunity, by forcing contact between officers and the people in solitary they have to escort to showers or recreation in accordance with DOCCS rules, and by discouraging people from reporting symptoms because they know they may likely end up in a SHU cell rather than receiving quality medical treatment. 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. The bill has more official legislative co-sponsors than the number of the votes needed to pass, and has been awaiting a full floor vote for more than a year.

In addition, Governor Cuomo has issued zero clemencies. Instead, he has released less than one half of one percent (.5%) of people using other, narrow mechanisms with sweeping categorical exclusions that leave behind the large majority of incarcerated people vulnerable to COVID-19. [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. These measures would not only prevent COVID-19 from creating a disaster in the prisons, but would also begin to reverse some of the damaging policies that have created mass incarceration and death by incarceration.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, at least 15 state prison systems and the federal prison system have recognized that preventing massive suffering and death behind bars necessitates significant reductions in prison populations, and have [reduced their incarcerated populations by more than one percent](#). Governors and state prison systems in Kentucky, California, Wisconsin, Utah, Maine, and Vermont, have all reduced their prison populations by more than at least four percent. [New York State prisons have more COVID cases](#), and higher rates of COVID, than all six of these states that have taken more action. New York State prisons have a high rate of confirmed infections despite only testing less than two percent of incarcerated people.

*Advocates dropped banners across from Queensboro Correctional Facility in Queens*

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