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In Wake of George Floyd Murder and Police Violence, Community Leaders Gathered to Demand NY State Stand Against Racist State Violence Behind Bars

Speakers Called on the Legislature to Pass the HALT Solitary Confinement Act, Elder Parole, and Fair and Timely Parole, in addition to Policing Reforms to Address Systemic Racism across New York's Criminal Legal System

Zoom Recording [Here](#); Password: 8o^qLg.7

(New York): Community leaders and advocates hosted a virtual press conference to call on the legislature to address systemic racism and violence across New York's criminal legal system, including in state prisons and local jails, by passing the HALT Solitary Confinement Act, Elder Parole, and Fair and Timely Parole--three bills currently pending in Albany.

The group uplifted the fact that the latest instances of police violence and racism in New York and across the United States come as there has been a [sharp rise in deaths with vast racial disparities](#) in New York State prisons. This continues a longstanding "[scourge of racial bias](#)" in New York State prisons -- from violent interpersonal racism by staff to the use of solitary confinement to parole denials that enforce death by incarceration. It also comes in the midst of a [surge](#) in suicide and self-harm in New York State prisons, with solitary confinement as a primary driver.

Cynthia Carter-Young, the sister of Leonard Carter, who died in prison of COVID-19 at 60 years old just weeks before his scheduled release, said, "Cuomo just doesn't care. If he cared, then these people wouldn't be locked up. My brother should have been home. His death is devastating. We talked to him on a regular basis. We were looking forward for him to be out, like so many other relatives of incarcerated people. Things need to change. The laws need to change."

Darlene McDay, whose son Dante Taylor died in solitary confinement after being beaten by prison staff, said, "I would do anything to have one more moment with my son again, to be able to tell him that I'm here, and tell him that I love him. Solitary confinement is cruel and unusual punishment. My son would be alive today if he were not placed in solitary confinement. We need to pass the HALT Solitary Confinement Act."

New York State Assembly Member Carmen De La Rosa, said, "Our communities are in pain right now. Black and Brown people have borne the brunt of racism for so long. Mass incarceration is a disease that directly stems from racism. We have to connect the dots

between police accountability and mass incarceration. As we work to repeal 50-A, we also have to deal with the disease of mass incarceration.”

New York State Senator Alessandra Biaggi, said, “I’m sick of asking if we can do the right thing. I’m sick of a criminal justice system that targets New Yorkers of color. More people are awake than ever before. We must end solitary confinement, fully repeal 50-A, and stop locking up older people.”

Jose Saldana, Director of the Release Aging People in People in Prison (RAPP) Campaign, who served 38 years in prison, said, “Our legal system in New York State is governed by racist ideology. The entire system is infected with this viral disease of racism. I’ve seen racist violence my entire life. This is a system that fails to prosecute their own but over prosecutes people in our communities. These bills will help correct the evil injustice that created mass incarceration.”

Roger Clark, Community Leader with the #HALTsolitary Campaign and VOCAL-NY, who survived years of solitary confinement, said, “Everyday in New York State, people are being tortured in solitary confinement. In 2019 alone, 6 New Yorkers died in solitary confinement. I spent 15 years in New York State prisons. I know what it feels like to get beat up in jail. We need to pass the HALT Solitary Confinement Act, Elder Parole, and Fair and Timely Parole. We can’t let this moment go by and just do patch work. We need to fix the entire criminal justice system.”

Background: [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. 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. These measures would begin to reverse some of the damaging policies that fueled mass incarceration and upheld systemic racism in New York State.

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