

## **\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

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### **LONG ISLAND ADVOCATES AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS RALLY TO CALL ON GOVERNOR CUOMO TO GRANT CLEMENCY AHEAD OF THE HOLIDAYS AND AMIDST COVID-19 SURGE**

Zoom [Recording of the Rally here](#)

**December 23, 2020 (Mineola, New York) --** This evening, roughly 40 Long Islanders with family members in prison, formerly incarcerated women and men, and advocates held a socially distant rally to call on Governor Andrew Cuomo to grant clemencies to New Yorkers in prison and reunite families, ahead of Christmas, and amid a surge of COVID-19 across the state prison system.

New York State prisons have recently experienced a [record-breaking number of COVID-19 infections](#). Amid the pandemic, Governor Andrew Cuomo has granted [three total clemencies](#) to New Yorkers in prison--fewer clemencies than [President Donald Trump](#), and governors in [California](#), [Illinois](#), and other states across the country. Cuomo has refused to take action despite calls from [advocates](#), [attorneys](#), [family members of people in prison](#), [public health experts](#), [Members of Congress](#), [district attorneys and philanthropists](#), [editorial boards](#), and [high profile celebrities](#) for him to grant wide-sweeping clemencies to people in prison in response to the virus.

During his nearly 10-year tenure as governor, Cuomo has granted 24 total clemencies--fewer than governors in republican states such as [Oklahoma](#) and [Kentucky](#), and democratic states such as California. Since 2016, [more than 6,400 incarcerated people in New York State prisons have submitted clemency applications](#). Thousands of applications have gone unanswered for years. The New York State constitution explicitly permits Governor Andrew M. Cuomo to grant clemency to anyone in the New York State prison system. There are currently roughly 36,000 people incarcerated in New York State prisons--nearly 9,000 are elderly people and roughly 8,600 are serving life sentences. There are also five mothers with infants incarcerated in Bedford Hills Correctional Facility.

#### **Speakers from the rally said:**

**Rebecca Figueroa, Long Island resident and member of New Hour for Women and Children Long Island, said,** “As a mother who gave birth in shackles behind bars, I have suffered unforgettable trauma. It is time for us to change the paradigm of harm and humiliation suffered by Black and Brown women behind bars. I am calling on Governor Cuomo to release all pregnant women and women who deserve to come home to their children this Christmas.”

**John Dukes, Long Island resident who served 19.5 years in prison, said,** “I served 19.5 years in prison. Tonight is about the brothers and sister I left behind. They’re still locked up. Governor Cuomo could free them with the stroke of a pen.”

**Jess Devlin, a Long Island resident whose father was incarcerated, said,** “Having a dad who couldn’t be with me for the holidays was devastating, now knowing that COVID-19 is ravaging the prisons makes me think of all the children who worry their parents won’t live through the pandemic.”

**Elmer Flores, Long Island Community Organizer with the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, said,** “Our loved ones are suffering inside the state prison system while COVID-19 continues to rage on unchecked. On the outside, their families and friends are hurting from the separation and the unknown of whether their incarcerated loved one will survive this holiday season. With the stroke of his pen, Governor Cuomo has the executive power to let them go, to reunite families and bring back our elders to our communities. Our communities and loved ones are depending on it. Governor Cuomo, grant clemencies now!”

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