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CRIMINAL JUSTICE ADVOCATES DISCOVER “[MISSING CHAPTER](#)” OF GOVERNOR CUOMO’S BOOK, CALL ON HIM TO ADDRESS THE COVID-19 CRISIS BEHIND BARS

Coalition of Criminal Justice Reform Advocates Make Case for Prison Release, Jail Decarceration & Enforcement of Proper Health Practices for Those Incarcerated During COVID Pandemic

New York, NY - Criminal justice reform advocates are concerned that Governor Cuomo’s soon-to-be released book on his handling of COVID-19 is missing critical information on his handling of jails and prisons throughout the pandemic. Advocates released “[The Missing Chapter](#)” to Cuomo’s book that documents the Cuomo administration’s failure to address COVID-19 behind bars. The Missing Chapter highlights dozens of anecdotes from incarcerated people, who account months of COVID-related prison horrors, including neglect, torture, and death. The Governor largely ignored recommendations from advocates and public health professionals despite countless calls for him to protect the lives of people behind bars. Advocates worry that continued inaction will lead to future outbreaks and more deaths, and are again raising recommendations that must be implemented to protect the lives of incarcerated New Yorkers.

Throughout the COVID crisis, Governor Cuomo has failed to respond to the concerns of older and immunocompromised people and those within one year of release. The Governor has only granted clemency to three people since the start of the pandemic (this is lower than both Democratic and Republican Governors across the country), and refuses to utilize his executive powers to meaningfully stop the spread of the virus. Instead, his prison agency has locked anyone with any symptoms in solitary confinement, where they report suffering without meaningful medical assistance. Worse, the Governor oversaw and drove significant changes to the state’s historic bail reform laws at the start of the pandemic, ensuring hundreds more people are being held in jail each day across the state as the public anticipates a second wave of the virus. Rather than committing to protecting and expanding pretrial freedom, the Governor did the opposite and put New Yorker’s lives at risk.

To add insult to injury, the recommendations that the Governor and other officials tout daily advising that people wear masks and engage in social distancing is difficult, if not impossible, for those behind bars to follow. Initially and at a critical moment in the pandemic, people in prison were not given access to face masks or hand sanitizer, but were nevertheless forced to produce those very items for all New Yorkers. To this day, people behind bars are still not being supplied with regular and sufficient PPE, and everyone is not guaranteed an opportunity for testing. The results have been disastrous.

Here are just a few accounts from people incarcerated across the state in “The Missing Chapter:”

“I am in fear of my life...the facility here does not provide adequate medical care or medical emergency to accommodate us in a time of need...”- Incarcerated Person at Auburn Correctional Facility.

"I am 63 years old, have HIV, Cirrhosis of the Liver and heart problems. I lost my mother to COVID, she was the one I wanted to go home to. Shortly after, I contracted COVID and struggled for months to shake the virus." - **Incarcerated Person at Green Haven Correctional Facility.**

"If we're not gonna get the proper medical attention, I'm gonna die of something else. It's like they just sent us to fade away and die." - **Incarcerated Person at Adirondack Correctional Facility.**

Advocates are calling on the Governor to take the crisis behind bars seriously. He must stop the harm and suffering happening on his watch as he tours and features his new book. Thousands of incarcerated New Yorkers, their families, and their communities are depending on it.

"What we know is that the Governor failed to take critical and necessary steps to save lives during this pandemic. Elders and immunocompromised people are still in prisons that don't offer adequate access to PPE and social distancing. Women were forced to give birth behind bars during the height of the crisis. Countless lives are at risk if the Governor continues to ignore this problem. The time to act is NOW if we want to avoid seeing more people die behind bars," **said Jose Saldana, Director of Release Aging People in Prison Campaign.**

"We refuse to allow the Governor to take a victory lap when he has neglected our neighbors and loved behind bars. In recounting the story of the COVID-19 crisis, the Governor must confront the illness and death in New York jails and prisons, and begin granting widespread clemency at once," **said Marvin Mayfield, Statewide Organizer of Center for Community Alternatives.**

"When I was in Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, we were told very little about COVID and we feared every day that we would come down with the virus and be left in our cell alone to die. I was afraid I would never make it home to see my children again," **said Dominique, New Hour for Women & Children LI member.**

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