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ADVOCATES RESPOND TO COVID-19 DEATHS OF THREE MORE INCARCERATED PEOPLE BY DEMANDING STATE LAWMAKERS PASS COVID-RELATED REFORMS AS THEY BEGIN 2021 SESSION

NINE PEOPLE INCARCERATED IN NY STATE PRISONS HAVE DIED OF COVID-19 IN THE LAST THREE WEEKS

NEW YORK -- Today, the NY State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) reported that three more incarcerated people—at Woodbourne, Coxsackie, and Midstate prisons—died of COVID-19. The people represent the 7th, 8th, and 9th incarcerated New Yorkers in the State's prison system to die of COVID-19 in the last three weeks alone—representing the largest-ever spike in COVID-related deaths in the New York State prison system. DOCCS data also shows that since Dec. 1, 3,372 incarcerated people have been infected with COVID-19. In response, **the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, Parole Preparation Project, Center for Community Alternatives, the #HALTsolitary Campaign, and FWD.us released the following statement:**

"As lawmakers in Albany are sworn into their legislative posts and begin the State's 2021 session, families and communities across New York State are fighting for the lives of their incarcerated loved ones. Because the Cuomo administration has failed to stop the spread of COVID-19 behind bars and resulting deaths, Albany lawmakers must save lives by passing COVID-related reforms, including Elder Parole, Fair and Timely Parole, and the HALT Solitary Confinement Act."

BACKGROUND: The New York State prison system reported the 25th, 26th, and 27th deaths of incarcerated people from COVID-19, this time at Woodbourne, Coxsackie, and Midstate Correctional Facilities. In the past few weeks, DOCCS also reported two COVID-related deaths at Coxsackie on December 31, another at Wende on December 30, another at Auburn on December 29, another at Clinton Correctional Facility on December 22, and another at Woodbourne Correctional Facility on December 17.

Since December 1, 3,372 incarcerated people have tested positive for COVID-19. There are currently outbreaks of the virus at Attica, Bedford Hills, Bare Hill, Clinton, Woodbourne, Groveland, Cayuga, and Walsh Correctional Facilities.

Through nearly ten months of the pandemic so far, Governor Andrew Cuomo has granted a total of ten clemencies to New Yorkers in prison--fewer clemencies than racist and xenophobic President Donald Trump and governors in California, Illinois, Oklahoma, Kentucky, 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. Instead of granting clemencies, Governor Cuomo has condemned thousands to solitary confinement, which only exacerbates the harm and spread of COVID-19.

There are many thousands of people in New York State prisons who are eligible for parole release, aged 50 and older, or imprisoned on a non-criminal technical parole violation, and/or within a year of their release date:
- 4,022 people who are already eligible for parole release
- 3,305 people held on technical parole violation
- 8,291 people aged 50 and older
- 6,524 within a year of max/condition release (including 5 women with infants who are part of the Bedford Hills nursery program and one pregnant woman)

Advocates have called for lawmakers in Albany to pass three bills that will address this pandemic and prevent similar tragedies in the future:

- 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.

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