

**\*\*PRESS RELEASE\*\***

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**Currently Incarcerated New Yorkers, Victim & Survivor Advocates, and 25+ State Lawmakers Announce New Parole Reform Campaign: People's Campaign for Parole Justice**

**2021 Platform Calls for the Passage of Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole Bills, and a Fair and Fully Staffed Parole Board**

**(New York)** -- Today, currently incarcerated New Yorkers, victim and survivor advocates, more than 25 state lawmakers, and a coalition of criminal justice groups hosted a virtual press conference launching a new statewide, grassroots campaign for parole reform in New York State: The People's Campaign for Parole Justice. Watch a video recording of the event [here](#).

The Campaign works to promote fair and meaningful release opportunities for incarcerated people in New York State prisons by advocating for passage of the Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills as well as a fair and fully staffed Parole Board. The primary goals of the campaign are decarceration and family reunification. The campaign platform is supported by 250 organizations across New York State, including many who represent victims and survivors of crime.

**Dino Caroselli, currently incarcerated at Sing Sing Correctional Facility**, said: "These bills are very important to me, other incarcerated people, and our families. For the first time in three decades, I feel alive again because they offer me hope, an opportunity for me to redeem myself, and a chance to take care of my wife. I beg the legislature to pass the Elder Parole bill and Fair and Timely Act to allow more incarcerated New Yorkers fair and meaningful opportunities for release based upon who they are today."

**Caroselli is a 65 year-old Brooklyn native who has served 27 years of a 65-year to life sentence. Unless Elder Parole passes, Dino won't be eligible for parole in his natural life, despite his rehabilitation.**

**Luz Marquez, anti-rape & survivor advocate with IamNegrx: Aya Rising Truth telling Project and a supporter of the parole justice campaign**, said: "Just as people who are incarcerated are sorry for the harm they have caused, those of us who do the work to support abuse and domestic violence survivors are sorry that we live in a society that responds to harm with punishment and more violence."

**Marie, currently incarcerated at Albion Correctional Facility** said: "I have been incarcerated for 19 and a half years, and will be 67 years old in February. I have five children and five grandchildren. These bills should be passed because we're not what our crimes were. We're sorry for what we've done and over the years we've changed and deserve to have a second chance in society."

**Marie, who prefers to remain anonymous, is a Long Island native, serving a 20-year to life sentence. The Fair and Timely Parole Act would ensure that her evaluation for release is based on her rehabilitation and current risk to public safety when she appears before the Parole Board later this year.**

"Typically, the actions taken in the name of survivors do not represent the actual desires of survivors. We would rather public officials take action to make sure our communities have the comprehensive resources we need to thrive and that prevent violence in the first place, and that people who commit harm have access to services they need. We support parole reform and urge the Legislature and the governor to pass Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole," said **Chrys Ballerano, Senior Director of Collaboration and Training with New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault.**

**Rachel Herzog, PREA Program Coordinator and Therapist with the Crime Victims Treatment Center and campaign supporter,** said: "We believe these reforms are deeply necessary and will provide healing not only for currently incarcerated people but numerous survivors as well."

**Stanley Bellamy, who is currently incarcerated and joined the press conference by phone from Green Haven Correctional Facility,** said: "When asked to make a statement about what Elder Parole and the Fair and Timely Parole Act would mean to me, my first response was hope, hope that it would finally give me the opportunity to present my case to a parole board. Even after all the pushback with bail reform, New Yorkers gave the Democrats a supermajority. When people vote, they are not only voting for a change in party but a change in policy. Now is the time to pass these bills."

**Chenequa Rogers, a community leader with Center for Community Alternatives whose uncle is incarcerated in state prison,** said: "After 27 years of incarceration the New York State parole board dealt my family a tremendous blow by denying my loved one the freedom that he worked so hard for. After changing his life and becoming an asset to himself and others, maintaining an exemplary discipline record, they rewarded him with an additional two years in prison, effectively re-sentencing him at their own discretion. This is why we need the passage of Fair and Timely Parole."

**NYS Senator Brad Hoylman, lead Senate sponsor of Elder Parole,** said: "I'm proud to stand with RAPP, grassroots advocates from across the State, and my fellow elected officials for the launch of the People's Campaign for Parole Justice. To achieve true parole justice, our correctional system must offer incarcerated people a meaningful opportunity for rehabilitation and reentry into their communities. My elder parole legislation would provide incarcerated seniors that opportunity, and ensure that our policies are consistent with the values of redemption, mercy and compassion shared by most New Yorkers. With a Democratic supermajority in both houses of the State Legislature I've never felt more certain that now is the moment to act, particularly as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to pose a serious threat to incarcerated people in jails and prisons across the State."

**Assembly Member Carmen De La Rosa, lead Assembly sponsor of the Elder Parole bill,** said: "We have been fighting for parole reform in New York because we believe in redemption and in the moral imperative that no one should be sentenced to death in prison. The COVID-19

pandemic has exacerbated the critical need to ensure that the Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole bills are passed this session. Our prison system's lack of health care infrastructure has set fire to a deadly outbreak that has already taken dozens of lives in New York State Prisons. Now is the time to move our state from an era of mass incarceration to an era of redemption and justice in our criminal justice system."

**NYS Senator Gustavo Rivera, lead Senate sponsor of Fair and Timely Parole**, said: "New York's laws have endlessly focused on criminalizing and incarcerating Black, brown, immigrant, and low-income communities. We have an obligation to pass legislation that will systematically reform our State's parole system including my Fair and Timely Parole bill. I proudly stand today with RAPP as they launch their People's Campaign for Parole Justice and I look forward to continuing to work with them to end the mass incarceration that is bleeding our communities dry."

"Unnecessary mass incarceration must end now. Thousands of New Yorkers who've served their time and demonstrated redemption are continuously denied parole. One key piece in correcting this injustice is Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole Reform," said **NYS Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes**. "I stand with the People's Campaign for Parole Justice and my fellow lawmakers in calling for an end to the inhumane and unjust practices that have long separated people who've paid their debt to society from their loved ones."

"Our criminal justice system, including parole, is in desperate need of reform," said **campaign supporter Senator Jeremy Cooney**. "We must invest in our communities through support and rehabilitation instead of punishment and address the racial inequalities that have permeated our country for too long."

**Campaign supporter Assembly Member Zohran Kwame Mamdani** said: "Part of why I ran for office is to ensure we bring dignity and humanity back to every New Yorker, incarcerated or not. I fully intend to use my power to visit a correctional facility as a legislator because for too long we have not seen the humanity of people behind bars."

"Mass incarceration directly impacts the welfare of children and families across our great state. When we are discussing ways to empower and uplift our communities, restorative justice has to be central to the conversation," stated **Assembly Member Michaelle C. Solages, Chairperson of the New York State Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislative Caucus**. "We are seeing professionals in law enforcement veer more towards prevention and diversion measures, and we must support their efforts by creating opportunities for individuals to re-assimilate back into society after time served. Thank you to all of the advocates who have helped launch the People's Campaign for Parole Justice to help ensure fair and just reforms to the criminal justice system."

"New York's overall prison population is shrinking but for people who are older the exact opposite is happening. The State spends two to three times more than they normally would to house older people despite their low recidivism rates. We hear stories all the time of people who have transformed themselves. Experts support early release programs for people who are elderly. I am in full support of Elder and Fair & Timely Parole and I will fight for these bills," said **campaign supporter Assembly Member Anna Kelles**

**Campaign supporter Senator Julia Salazar** said: “Passing these bills was urgent before and will continue to be urgent after the pandemic, but right now because of Covid it is a public health crisis. We should be implementing compassionate and constructive policies like Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole.”

**Campaign supporter Assembly Member Catalina Cruz** said: “I think we are out of excuses. We have a supermajority, we have the will, we have folks who truly believe this is the humane thing to do. It is my hope this is the last time people have to share their pain and we finally do the right thing and pass these bills.”

“It's time to pass these bills and have a fair and fully staffed parole board. This is not just a criminal justice issue, it is a racial justice, gender justice, disability justice, and public health issue. The State has turned its back on incarcerated people during this pandemic. I join the chorus in saying this is wrong and that we must move quickly. Governor Cuomo cannot just say he cares about the Black and Brown community when it is politically opportune. We have to make sure he means it,” said **campaign supporter Assembly Member Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas**.

"I have been impacted by the system personally and have visited many correctional facilities and I can tell you that they are no place for a human being to live. I stand with you all every step of the way," said **campaign supporter Assembly Member Chantel Jackson**.

"I believe people can change. Because if they can, then there is hope. And that is what we should be fighting for as legislators," said **campaign supporter Assembly Member Phara Souffrant Forrest**.

**Assembly Member Marcela Mitaynes, a supporter of the campaign**, said: “Long prison sentences are not rooted in rehabilitation, they are rooted in punishment. Incarceration is cruel, and is especially cruel during a pandemic. You have me as an ally in the State Legislature.”

**Campaign supporter, Assembly Correction Committee Chair and Fair and Timely Parole lead sponsor David Weprin**, said: “We have to continue to diversify the Parole Board so they look more like the people who are coming before them. I am the lead sponsor of the Fair and Timely Parole Act, I am committed to parole reform, and will continue to advocate for it.”

"If we believe people can grow, then we need a system that reflects that. The current one doesn't. We do not need to spend another year talking about these issues. We need to do better," said **campaign supporter Assembly Member Harvey Epstein**.

“Many people in my community have been impacted by these issues and I have family and friends who have endured this system. I believe our State has a responsibility to rectify the wrongs of policies from decades before through fair and equitable parole systems,” said **campaign supporter Assembly Member Kenny Burgos**.

**BACKGROUND:** The People’s Campaign for Parole Justice is a new statewide, grassroots campaign pushing for parole reform in New York State. The campaign platform is supported by 250 organizations across New York State and led by a coalition of the state’s biggest, most influential social justice and criminal justice groups, including the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, Parole Preparation Project, VOCAL-NY, Citizen Action, New Hour for

Women and Children, NY Communities for Change, Center for Community Alternatives, Capitol Area Against Mass Incarceration, Osborne Association, NY Civil Liberties Union, [FWD.us](http://FWD.us), #HALTsolitary Campaign, Legal Aid Society, Center for Justice at Columbia, CUNY Law Defenders Clinic, NYU Law's Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law.

COVID-19 is worsening in New York State prisons. Since the start of the pandemic, more than 3,800 people incarcerated in prisons have tested positive for COVID-19 (over 1,000 in the past month). Twenty-eight incarcerated people have died of COVID so far, including 10 deaths in the last month alone. There are currently outbreaks of the virus at Attica, Albion, Coxsackie, Bedford Hills, Bare Hill, Clinton, Woodbourne, Groveland, Cayuga, and Walsh Correctional Facilities.

The People's Campaign for Parole Justice are calling on lawmakers in Albany to pass two bills that will address this pandemic behind bars and prevent similar tragedies in the future:

- [Elder Parole \(S.15\)](#) 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 \(S.1415\)](#) would provide more meaningful parole reviews for incarcerated people who are already parole eligible.

The Campaign is also calling on Governor Cuomo to fully staff the Parole Board with 19 Commissioners who come from communities that have been directly affected by mass incarceration and have professional and clinical backgrounds including social work, nursing, reentry services, and other fields that allow them to evaluate incarcerated people for who they are today. The Board currently has three vacancies.

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