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****PRESS RELEASE****

**AHEAD OF 2022 LEGISLATIVE SESSION,
MANHATTAN & BROOKLYN DISTRICT
ATTORNEYS, NY LAWMAKERS & FAMILIES WITH
LOVED ONES IN PRISON CALL FOR PAROLE
JUSTICE**

*Amid the Omicron Crisis Behind Bars, Statewide Coalition
Held Press Conference Calling for Passage of the Elder
Parole and Fair & Timely Parole Bills on Day 1*

(New York) – Today, on the day before the start of the 2022 NY Legislative Session and Gov. Kathy Hochul’s first State of the State address, Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, and key state lawmakers joined formerly incarcerated advocates and families with loved ones in prison for a virtual press conference urging swift action to pass the Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills. Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez added his voice to the chorus of support with a statement, as well. With the recent spate of [COVID deaths behind bars](#), and the longstanding [crisis of aging and death behind bars](#), speakers highlighted the urgency of action and called on lawmakers to advance the bills on Day One of the new session. **Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg**, said: “I am proud to stand with advocates in support of these bills. These are not only common sense bills but they are also driven by data and sound public policy. This is important to the County of Manhattan and to me, personally. And this

is a racial justice issue when we look at who is incarcerated and the Parole Board outcomes.”

Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez, said: “Every incarcerated person deserves a parole system that is meaningful, compassionate, and includes not only punishment but also the possibility of redemption. Our families and communities, our entire society, deserve it as well. The Fair and Timely Parole and Elder Parole bills are consistent with my view that in most cases, parole should be granted at the first eligibility except under extraordinary circumstances, and that people should not be defined forever by the worst thing they ever did.”

Theresa Grady, Harlem Community Leader with the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, whose husband is currently incarcerated, said: “My husband is in his sixties, serving a 40-year sentence. He is currently suffering inside right now with kidney issues. If I'm being honest, he won't make it until the end of his sentence. He'll be dead. That's why we need to pass the Elder Parole and Pass Fair and Timely Parole bills. Our loved ones need to come home.”

State Senator Julia Salazar (Brooklyn), Chair of the Senate Committee on Crime Victims, Crime and Correction, and lead sponsor of the Fair and Timely Parole bill, said: “We need parole justice in New York in order to minimize the number of people who are spending the end of their lives in prison and continuing to be locked up long after they have been rehabilitated. It is cruel that we keep our elders and so many people in these conditions for far too long. I am urging my colleagues to support these bills. This needs to be the year.”

Greg Mingo, Westchester Community Leader with the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, said: “I spent 40 years in prison and I survived. But there are a lot of people who haven't. The day before I was released, my friend died in prison. He went in at 16 and spent 45 years in prison. We need these bills to save lives.”

State Assembly Member David Weprin (Queens), Chair of the Assembly Correction Committee, and lead sponsor of the Fair & Timely Parole bill, said: “Our system must recognize when someone takes responsibility and takes the steps to rehabilitate themselves. I refuse to let the vulnerable and elderly remain in these deplorable

conditions and separated from their families. The time is now to pass these bills.”

Jose Di Lenola, Rochester Community Leader with the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, said: “I just came home 14 days ago. Throughout my incarceration I participated in almost every program offered. And I connected with other men who have fully taken responsibility for the harm they caused and taken the steps to look inside themselves and change. I'm asking people to think about the people in prison who are ready to come home, who have been ready. There are so many of us.”

Caroline Hansen, Long Island Community Leader with the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, whose husband is currently incarcerated, said: “My husband is currently serving a life without parole sentence. He has been incarcerated for 26 years and was sentenced when he was 20 years old. The only chance he has at coming home is if these bills are passed. It's the only chance or he will die in prison. He is no longer the 20 year old he was. He is a father, a husband, a son. His dad just said to me that he doesn't want to see his son die in prison. These bills have to be passed. People directly impacted by incarceration need our voices heard.”

State Senator Brad Hoylman, Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee and Lead Sponsor of the Elder Parole bill, said: “What we are seeking is an opportunity for people to have a chance to appear before the Parole Board. They give people a chance to return home. I and my colleagues will ensure that we seek justice this session for the members of our communities.”

Jerome Wright, Formerly Incarcerated Faith Leader in Buffalo, said: “I was 18 years old when I was sentenced to 18.5 years to life in prison. The judge even told me he wished he could give me less time and that if I do what I should, I should get out at my first Board. I ran so many programs inside. I changed myself and helped others inside. But I spent 30 years in prison. And I only was released because a judge saw it as an injustice. There should not be a threat by a judge to the Parole Board in order to get them to let people go. It's time we stop perpetually punishing people especially for crimes they committed in their youth. No one is the same person they were decades ago. It is time we stop

criminalizing people and start returning them to society so they can mentor the next generation.”

State Assembly Member Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas (Queens), said:

“Within my first year in the Assembly I have visited prisons and jails around the state and I've heard over and over again that people change and should not be defined by the worst moment of their life. These are common sense bills. They will enhance safety and unite families.”

State Assembly Member Harvey Epstein (Manhattan), said: “This is an important time in our state's history. We have the opportunity to pass meaningful criminal justice reform. We have the votes, the question is if we have the will. People's lives are dependent on it. People will die if they are not released. Let's get Parole Justice done in 2022.”

Marcine Bussey, Syracuse Community Leader with Center for Community Alternatives, said: “Why are we continuing to incarcerate people when we could be using that money to address the injustices in our communities? They told us in prison that in order to be released we needed to do programs and show a capacity to change. So if I do that, why keep me inside? If someone is in a position to release someone who has shown they have corrected their ways, it is a crime to keep that person locked up.”

BACKGROUND:

- New York’s prison system currently incarcerates more than two times more people than at the beginning of New York’s mass incarceration era, in 1970 (approximately 31,000 people vs. 12,059 people).
- The average age of death behind bars was only 58 before COVID because of state policy failures.
- There is a crisis of aging and dying for New Yorkers in prison and their families because of decades of extreme sentencing and blanket denials of parole release by a racially biased Parole Board.
- 55% of the roughly 30,000 people currently incarcerated in New York State prisons are Black people, despite the fact that only 18% of the overall population in the state is Black. 77% are People of Color.

- According to a [Times Union analysis](#) of the nearly 19,000 parole board decisions over the last two years, racial bias infects parole release determinations and disparities have only widened in recent years. The data, which spans October 2018 through October 2020, shows the Parole Board granted parole release to 41 percent of white people, compared to 34 percent of Black people and 33 percent of Latinx people.
- Nearly 1-in-4 (24%) people in New York State prisons are serving life or virtual life sentences.
- 4,704 people in prison are defined by NYS DOCCS as older adults, meaning they are 55 or older.
- Without reforms to expand access to parole release and make the process more fair in New York State, New Yorkers, especially those who are Black and Latinx, will continue to age without dignity, get sick, and die in prison regardless of their transformation and potential benefits to the outside community.
- The People’s Campaign for Parole Justice is calling on lawmakers in Albany to pass two bills that, together, will ensure that people in prison have meaningful opportunities for individualized consideration for parole release based on who they are today, what they have done to change, and whether they pose a risk if released:
 - [Elder Parole \(S.15A/A.3475A\)](#) would allow the State Board of Parole to conduct an evaluation for potential parole release to incarcerated older people who have already served 15 or more years, including some of the state’s oldest and sickest incarcerated people.
 - [Fair and Timely Parole \(S.7514/A.4231A\)](#) would provide more meaningful parole reviews for incarcerated people who are already parole eligible.
- The Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills are supported by more than 300 organizations across New York State, including some of the largest crime victims and survivor advocacy groups due to [the connections between parole justice and justice for victims and survivors of crime](#): The New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Crime Victims Treatment Center, The Working Families Party, 1199 SEIU, CWA District 1, VOCAL-NY,

Citizen Action, New Hour for Women and Children, LiveOn NY, JASA, the Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging, NY Communities for Change, Center for Community Alternatives, Osborne Association, NYCLU, FWD.us, the #HALTsolitary Campaign, Legal Aid Society, Center for Justice at Columbia, and NYU Law's Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law.

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