

****PRESS RELEASE****

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**NY LAWMAKERS, FORMER PAROLE BOARD
COMMISSIONER, NAACP-NY STATE & NEW
YORKERS IMPACTED BY MASS INCARCERATION
HOST FIRST MAJOR DAY OF ACTION FOR
PAROLE REFORM IN 2022**

*As Part of a Virtual Advocacy Day with 750 Participants
from Across NY State, Speakers Called for Action to Pass the
Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole Bills at Start of 2022
Legislative Session*

(NEW YORK) – **As part of the first major Advocacy Day of 2022, the NAACP-New York State Conference, former NY Parole Board Commissioner Carol Shapiro, and state and county lawmakers from across the state** joined New Yorkers impacted by mass incarceration in a virtual press conference to urge passage of the Fair & Timely Parole and Elder Parole bills.

Jose Saldana, Executive Director, Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, said: “I woke up this morning and went to my office and there was an anniversary card from my wife. Because 4 years ago on this very day, I walked out of Green Haven prison. I thought about where I am today and it hit me because I know I didn't get here by myself. I thought of the many men who helped me be the person I am today. I think about them often, especially the ones who passed away in prison. I think about the men I left behind who are still alive who may very well die in prison if we don't pass these two bills. We can't afford another year. Some of the people who will be a benefit to society will not be with us anymore if we don't pass these bills. We have no choice, not just for them but their families.”

Dr. Divine Pryor, Criminal Justice Co-Chair, NAACP State Conference, said: “Today I am here for Dr. Hazel Dukes. As far as we are concerned this is low hanging fruit. This should not be an uphill battle. People who are incarcerated are valuable to our communities. If we have elderly people in NY State prison, we know by virtue of their age and the research that they pose no threat to our communities. So we need to figure out how to get them back in our communities so they can provide us with their mentorship and wisdom. If you look at this issue from any perspective—moral, ethical, financial—all the boxes are checked that we should pass these bills immediately. The NY State Chapter of the NAACP is in full support of these bills and ready to do what's necessary to pass them.”

Jose Di Lenola (Rochester), recently released from prison after serving 26 years, said: “When I went to prison I was 16. If I didn't have elders around me to lead me and guide me, I would not be the person I am today and I might not be alive. I am a rare case that was granted parole on my first hearing. I know someone who has been denied 16 times. He might die in prison. These are the people we definitely need in our communities to show them there are better ways to resolve conflicts and be successful. Please support these bills.”

April Baskin, Chair of the Erie County Legislature (Buffalo), said: “Older incarcerated people should not be suffering in prison until the end of their days. We need to get this done for community safety. These reforms will give dedicated, community driven people the opportunity to serve as mentors to young people in their communities. We need to do this for racial justice. We know Black and Brown people are released far less by the Parole Board. We need to do this to reinvest in our communities. Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole will save \$522 million annually. We need to do this because it is the fair and just thing to do. I am here to stand with my partners across the state to say let's get parole reform done in 2022.”

Assembly Member Taylor Darling (Long Island), said: “Incarceration does not just happen to the incarcerated. It is an experience that impacts entire families and communities. Understanding the enormous injustices built into the justice system places so much more weight on the incarceration process and experience. This is why the parole process is

so vital. Parole is an opportunity for individuals who have allowed time and reformation measures to render them a second chance at life beyond bars. Life with their families. Life with their communities. I am happy to commit all that I can to ensure that the parole process is as fair, just and humane as possible. I want to thank the advocates and fighters for believing in this cause and never giving up. It means a lot.”

TeAna Taylor (Schenectady), Co-Director of Policy and Communications, Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, said:

“There is a whole community of transformed incarcerated people, and especially elders, who deserve to be free to live the rest of their lives building our communities and being with their families. Black people have historically been harmed by the racist criminal legal system in this state, and this country at large. The passage of these two bills will be a much needed and long overdue start of undoing some of the harm that has been done.”

Assembly Member Maritza Davila (Brooklyn), said: “I too had a relative who did about 25 years in prison. He was continually denied parole. He is home now and he is one of the most productive individuals I have ever met. These bills are about giving people opportunities and not allowing them to die inside.”

Assembly Member David Weprin (Queens), Chair of the Assembly Corrections Committee, said: "I believe 2022 will be the year we achieve parole justice and get these bills passed. These two bills will make a huge difference in people's lives. When someone goes to prison, they are not the same person years later. The nature of the crime committed can never change but the person who committed it can. Our system should be focused on who a person is today. My faith and conscience can not allow for people to continue to be punished. I refuse to continue to separate families.”

Senator Brad Hoylman (Manhattan), said: “These bills would serve as an incentive for people behind bars to continue to transform their lives. I am so grateful to all my colleagues here for supporting these bills.”

Assembly Member Anna Kelles (Ithaca), said: “These bills will insist upon common sense measures to treat incarcerated people with humanity, dignity, and fairness. That is all we are asking for. We could

reinvest the money saved from these bills into resources we know are proven to reduce crime.”

Carol Shapiro, former NY State Parole Board Commissioner, said: “We need these two bills to bring justice back to our families and our communities. When I was on the Parole Board I had the opportunity to meet many people who had transformed their lives and deserved the respect of a parole system that recognizes who they are today. One of those people was Jose Saldana who is the director of RAPP. We need a system that is not conveyor belt justice, as I call it. We need a system that is fair, cost effective, and brings people back home where they deserve to be.”

Assembly Member Michaelle Solages (Long Island), Chair of the NY State Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Caucus, said: “As the chair of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, Asian caucus, as a Long Islander and as a co-sponsor of both Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole, I urge my colleagues to swiftly move to stymie the wave of death behind bars by allowing elders behind bars to seek parole consideration. We know the parole board should and can make meaningful deliberations to consider release for parents and grandparents. The majority of incarcerated elders are Black and Brown people who deserve a meaningful chance to give back to their community and to bring healing to families impacted by incarceration.”

Assemblymember Kenny Burgos (Bronx), said: “As chair of the Reentry and Transitional Services Subcommittee, the issue of reentry and parole justice is a deep passion of mine. I strongly believe that incarcerated individuals in good standing that have long paid their debt to society deserve an opportunity to rebuild their lives. With a significant increase among deaths in New York State's prisons over the past decade, especially those over 55, the passage of the Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills must be a top priority this session in order to address this ongoing crisis.”

Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried (Manhattan), Chair of the Assembly Health Committee, said: “Thousands of New Yorkers whose parole would pose a minimal risk to public safety are suffering the devastating effects of imprisonment on their physical and mental health. Many premature deaths are occurring that wouldn't have occurred if

these New Yorkers were allowed to leave correctional facilities. It's time New York State did the responsible, moral thing, and enacted elder parole and fair and timely parole laws.”

Assembly Member Chris Burdick (Westchester), said: “We are in a time of crisis with COVID and racial and justice inequity. We need to enact Fair & Timely and Elder Parole now. I have called on the Governor to support this commonsense legislation that has the potential to change not only the lives of those who have been reformed while incarcerated but also of their families and loved ones.”

Rachel Barnhart, Monroe County legislator (Rochester), said: “Instead of using fear-mongering about criminal justice reforms, we need to use evidence. These bills are based on sound research and should be passed this session.”

Senator Samra Brouk (Rochester), said: “Too many families are devastated by our system of mass incarceration in New York State. While there is no one bill that will undo the damage that this system has brought to some of New York’s most underserved populations, I am proud to be an ally in the Senate for common sense reforms to our system. We must do everything in our power to reunite families, and allow for healing to take place within our communities.”

Assembly Member Alicia Hyndman (Queens), said: “Our current mass incarceration numbers have reached its breaking point. Having one person dying every three days coupled with hazardous conditions is unacceptable. The incarceration of nonviolent bodies has hit its boiling point. Passing this bill would mean better help for families, smart investments to combat COVID-19 and create better community safety.”

Assembly Member Jo Anne Simon (Brooklyn), said: “We must pass the Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole bills to end mass incarceration and ensure racial justice. Too many people are dying in prison and we know that Black and Brown people are far less likely to get released by the Parole Board. There is a groundswell of support for these initiatives because they are the right and humane things to do and they make good policy sense. I’m proud to support these bills and stand strong with the People’s Campaign for Parole Justice.”

Senator Robert Jackson (Manhattan), said: “Over-incarceration is not justice. As we enter the new year, I think about those with incarcerated

loved ones or who have passed away behind bars. We need to expand the use of clemency to release aging people in prison, reunite families and save lives. The longer we wait, the more elders in prison will go without healthcare, without dignity, and the more elders will get sick and die without ever seeing the outside again. As a progressive leader, NY should listen to survivors of crime and violence who have lifted their voices, calling for empathy over endless punishment for those who have committed harm. They want rehabilitation, healing, and resources. We must pass the Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills; I am proud to stand with this broad coalition of advocates in support of these bills to make New York a state that supports redemption.”

Assembly Member Stefani L. Zinerman (Brooklyn), said: “The intersectionality of race and age during this extended Covid-19 pandemic remains a devastating tragedy among our state prison populations. A record number of deaths, among older, black and Latino incarcerated people, escalates the need for timely parole. This crisis must be addressed in the 2022 legislative session. I remain committed, along with my Assembly colleagues, to fighting for the freedom and timely release of our incarcerated elders.”

State Senator Jessica Ramos (Queens), said: “Often when we discuss parole justice, we rightfully frame the discussion in relation to the deep injustice and harm that prisons inflict on people and communities. Fair and Timely Parole and Elder Parole are the moral and just things to do because they are policies that are rooted in compassion and a holistic understanding of what builds true public safety. What is less often discussed, however, is the healing we can bring to the almost 100,000 children who are growing up with an incarcerated parent. We don't discuss enough the \$522 million dollars we can use upstream to address the conditions that drive racist and classist systems of mass incarceration. Incarceration has a high cost for our society, one that we can relieve with Parole Justice.”

Assembly Member Yuh-Line Niou (Manhattan): said, “This is not just about cost savings, this is about humanity and seeing people as people. People in my community feel like this is the biggest thing we can do to help our community. People deserve a second chance.”

Assembly Member Harvey Epstein (Manhattan) said, “With Covid getting worse, the vulnerable people living in prison are at severe risk of dying. Give them a chance to come back to our communities. These bills are a chance for that to happen. We are going to get parole justice done.”

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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