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Full Press Conference [Zoom Recording Here](#)

AFTER PASSAGE OF NY STATE BUDGET, COALITION OF POLITICAL LEADERS, ADVOCATES & LAWMAKERS HOLD PRESS CONFERENCE: PAROLE REFORM IS NEXT ON ALBANY AGENDA

PARTICIPANTS HIGHLIGHTED THE URGENCY OF PASSING ELDER PAROLE AND FAIR & TIMELY PAROLE BILLS AND LAY OUT THE HUMAN AND FINANCIAL TOLL OF INACTION

April 12, 2021 (New York): Today, New York State political leaders from the Working Families Party, Citizen Action of NY, and Communications Workers of America (CWA 1) and ten state lawmakers joined community members of the People’s Campaign for Parole Justice for a virtual press conference called: “Parole Justice is Next,” identifying the passage of the Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills as top priorities for the post-budget state legislative session in Albany. Together, these bills would ensure that people in NY State prisons have meaningful opportunities for individualized parole release consideration based on their rehabilitation and readiness for release. As part of the event, the campaign launched a [new website](#) and a [powerful campaign video](#).

Stanley Bellamy, who’s currently incarcerated at Green Haven Prison, and joined the press conference via phone, said: “The need for parole justice cannot be overstated. We are at a pivotal moment in New York State history, where the question before us is whether we will continue down the path of punitive justice or move toward a more fair and balanced approach to parole. In 1985, when I was arrested, I was 23 years old. I am now 58 years old, serving a 62.5-year to life sentence. We must move forward. Backwards thinking has only led us down a path to mass incarceration. That is why we need parole justice now.”

Sochie Nnaemeka, Director of the NY Working Families Party, said: “This year’s legislative session has shown us what is possible when elected leaders work side by side with grassroots communities. But our work is not done. We have so much more work to do to end the crisis of mass incarceration, and to restore the health and stability of our communities. As we enter into the second half of the legislative session, parole justice must be a top priority. Right now there are thousands of people in New York State prisons who are sick and dying in prisons without any meaningful opportunity to return back to their families. This is a human rights atrocity and it’s happening right here in our state. Incarceration without a fair chance at release is a death sentence by another name. We have to pass Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole. These are urgent matters of racial justice.”

Lisette Nieves, Bronx Community Leader with the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, said: “My brother went to prison at 16 years old. He is serving a 48-year to life sentence. He has been in prison for 38 years. Everyday he asks me if the bills are being voted on. My brother matters to me.”

Hae-Lin Choi, Political Director of Communication Workers of America (CWA District 1), said: “CWA has always stood for criminal justice reform. Our work is far from done. Our justice system is rooted in racism. White people are more likely to be released on parole than Black and

Brown people. We at CWA support legislation to create fair and timely parole and we also support Elder Parole. As unions, we are all about justice inside and outside of our workplaces. I'm ready to cry happy tears when we pass these bills.”

Theresa Grady, Manhattan Community Leader with the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, said: “My husband is serving 40 years. He is older and has already done 16 years. We have three daughters. As NY State lawmakers head into the 2nd half of their legislative session, parole justice must be a priority. Parole justice must be now.”

Senator Liz Krueger (Manhattan), Chair of the NY State Finance Committee, said: “This is about rebuilding families, rebuilding communities, and humane behavior towards each other. These folks are not a risk to others. They've done their time. We all need to understand this.”

Nawanna Tucker, Queens Community Leader with the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, said: “My husband has been in prison for 33 years. He helped me adopt our young daughter. He is the only father she knows. Our loved ones deserve a second chance. Let's pass and sign these bills.”

Senator Jeremy Cooney (Rochester), said: “I'm proud to be a co-sponsor of both Fair & Timely Parole and Elder Parole. When I hear about the plight of so many of our neighbors who are incarcerated, it is shocking. I look forward to working together on this.”

Assembly Member Anna Kelles (Ithaca), said: “Fair & Timely Parole and Elder Parole are critical companions to legalizing marijuana and halting solitary confinement. We need the whole package. We're forcing too many people who have transformed their lives to die in prison. We know that this is unjust, inhumane, and a waste of resources. We have this backwards idea that the sheer amount of time people serve is the most important thing. Where is the science to that? It's an irrational measure of rehabilitation. We have an opportunity to do what's right in New York State. We must pass Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole. These bills are right morally and important economically.”

Assembly Member Carmen De La Rosa (Manhattan), Lead sponsor of Elder Parole, said: “It's true that we passed a great budget last week. But all of those wins would be for naught if we leave behind people in prison. We know that the parole system is racist. We know we need to dismantle this system. When I agreed to take on Elder Parole, I took it with two basic premises in mind: first, that everyone is compatible of transformation. Second, no one's life is more valuable than anyone else's. We are equal human beings in the eyes of God. Our laws need to reflect that.”

Senator Brad Hoylman (Manhattan), lead sponsor of Elder Parole, said: “Our penal system is fundamentally racist and is destroying communities and families with very little regard for the lives of the people impacted most. We should give everyone a second chance.”

Assembly Member Demond Meeks (Rochester), said: “These issues impact Rochester. Imagine spending 50 years in prison. I'm sick and tired of the sound bite politics. We need to be intentional about all of these issues.”

Stanley Fritz, Political and Campaigns Director at Citizen Action of NY, said: “As we head

into the second half of the legislative session, there is an opportunity for the legislature to say that the idea that people need to be sitting and rotting away in prisons is wrong. If this COVID outbreak has taught us nothing else, it is to value human life. I'm urging legislators to make sure we pass Elder Parole, urging legislators to make sure we pass Fair and Timely Parole."

Assembly Member Sarah Clark (Western NY), said: "For me this is all about what we want our society to look like. Do we want our system to be as punitive as it currently is or do we want a system that is restorative? I'm excited to keep fighting for a better system for everyone."

Senator Jabari Brisport (Brooklyn), said: "We will win this if we all fight together. I can't wait to make these bills a priority in the second half of the legislative session. It's time to bring some more justice and fairness to New York State."

Assembly Member Harvey Epstein, said: "When I went to visit Green Haven prison, I met people who were dying, who still had decades to serve in prison. Why are we letting these people languish in prison? It's immoral, it's not justice, and it's not economical."

BACKGROUND: The People's Campaign for Parole Justice is a statewide, grassroots campaign pushing for parole reform in New York State. The campaign platform is supported by more 300 organizations across New York State and led by a coalition of the state's biggest and 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, NYCLU, FWD.us, #HALTsolitary Campaign, Legal Aid Society, Center for Justice at Columbia, CUNY Law Defenders Clinic, and NYU Law's Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law.

Racism infects the parole release system just as it does every element of the criminal legal system. A white person in a New York prison is significantly more likely on average to be released on parole than a Black or Latinx person and the disparity widened in 2020, according to a [Times Union analysis](#) of the nearly 19,000 parole board decisions over the last two 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. Importantly, these racial disparities are not new. In 2016, the [New York Times conducted an investigation](#) of parole release data and similarly found Black and Latinx people were significantly less likely to be released than their white counterparts.

The People's Campaign for Parole Justice is 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 \(S.15/A.3475\)](#) 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 \(S.1415/A.4231\)](#) 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 who have professional and clinical backgrounds in areas such as 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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