

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

Contact: Dave George, [ddgeorge23@gmail.com](mailto:ddgeorge23@gmail.com), 631-885-3565

**ADVOCATES, STATE LAWMAKERS HOLD RALLY AND VIGIL IN THE WAKE OF IN-PRISON DEATH OF SALIH ABDULLAH**

**74 YEAR-OLD ELDER WHO SUFFERED A FATAL STROKE IN THE MIDDLE OF HIS 14TH PAROLE BOARD INTERVIEW AT WENDE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY AFTER 47 YEARS IN PRISON**

*The Group Called on Lawmakers in Albany to Pass the Fair and Timely Parole Act and Elder Parole Bill to Address Governor Cuomo’s and the Parole Board’s Fatal Lack of Prison Releases*



*Demonstrators in New York City in front of tombstones of other people who recently died in New York State prisons*

**NEW YORK** -- Tonight, Formerly incarcerated leaders, New York State Senators Brad Holyman, Julia Salazar, and other state lawmakers, and other advocates held coordinated rallies and vigils in New York City and Albany to demand justice in wake of the in-prison death of 74 year-old elder, Salih Abdullah, who served nearly 50 years behind bars and suffered a fatal stroke in the middle of his 14th appearance before the New York State Parole Board.

Advocates at the rally highlighted their demands for lawmakers in Albany to pass the Elder Parole Bill and the Fair & Timely Parole Act in response to Governor Cuomo's and the Parole Board's unwillingness to release incarcerated older people who have served decades in prison and pose minimal risk to public safety.

**Recording of the [full rally here](#)**

The rallies and vigils were organized by the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, Center for Community Alternatives, #HALTsolitary Campaign, New Hour for Women and Children, VOCAL New York, and other community based organizations.

Salih Abdullah was sentenced to 25 years to life in 1974 for a crime in which one police officer was killed by friendly fire and another police officer was wounded. During his time in prison, Mr. Abdullah earned college degrees, mentored many of his peers, and was a leader in the Muslim community. Despite his accomplishments and clear evidence of rehabilitation, the New York State Parole Board denied parole release to Mr. Abdullah 13 times, adding more than 20 additional years to his court-imposed minimum sentence. In the middle of his 14th Parole Board appearance at Wende Correctional Facility in Western NY, Mr. Abdullah suffered a fatal stroke. He died on September 26th at an outside Buffalo hospital. He is survived by his older brother.

The New York State Parole Board denies release to the majority of the roughly 11,000 incarcerated people in New York State prisons who annually appear before the Board. In part, the Parole Board's denials cause many incarcerated New Yorkers to spend years and decades longer in prison, often causing people to age into their older years. To address these issues, advocates and many lawmakers are calling for the Fair and Timely Parole Act and the Elder Parole bill. Both bills would collectively ensure that incarcerated New Yorkers have fair and meaningful opportunities for release during their time of incarceration.

**Emilee Sahli, Salih Abdullah's attorney and longtime supporter, said,** "I know we are all here because of the tragic outcome but I want to talk about who Salih was. Salih was an artist, he loved to write, he was a friend, a brother, and he was loved by so many."

**Jose Saldana, Director of the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign, who was friends with Salih during his 38 years in prison, said,** "Salih was tortured and murdered by DOCCS. He died because of the failure of elected officials to end mass incarceration. Being in prison for half a century should not be normal. Had our legislators passed the Fair & Timely Parole Act last year when they had the opportunity to, Salih would still be with us"

**Serena Liguori, Executive Director of New Hour for Women and Children, said,** "The fact that our state allows people to die behind bars and state-sanctioned violence, just seems like

nothing will be enough for them to make a change. How could you let a 74 year old die behind bars?”

**Anthony Dixon, Director of Community Engagement with the Parole Preparation Project, said,** “Even as we moved into a more ‘progressive’ age, the Parole Board has been locked on a culture of punishment. After 13 parole denials, Salih had given up. 13 Parole Boards killed him. Death by incarceration, death by parole board.”



*An old photo of Salih Abdullah with his mother*

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