

*****PRESS RELEASE*****

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**LONG ISLAND & WESTCHESTER LAWMAKERS & ADVOCATES
HOLD VIRTUAL PRESS CONFERENCE CALLING FOR PASSAGE OF
PAROLE JUSTICE MEASURES AS SESSION NEARS CLOSE**

*SPEAKERS HIGHLIGHT THE CRISIS OF AGING AND DYING OF SUBURBAN
NEW YORKERS IN PRISONS AND DEMAND PASSAGE OF THE ELDER
PAROLE AND FAIR & TIMELY PAROLE BILLS*

(Long Island & Westchester, NY) -- Today, New York State lawmakers representing suburban districts in Long Island and Westchester, families with incarcerated loved ones, formerly incarcerated community leaders, faith leaders, and other local advocates held a virtual press conference to demand passage of the People's Campaign for Parole Justice platform, which includes the Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills. The virtual press conference took place as the end of the 2021 legislative session nears and both bills have been [widely identified](#) as [topline agenda items](#) in [these final days](#).

“The data in and states have gathered sufficient evidence to show that there is no correlation between mass incarceration and safer communities. Consequently, we have the opportunity to make some progress here in New York through parole justice. The reform measures proposed work in tandem to ensure that our criminal justice system is centered on restorative justice,” **Assemblywoman Michaelle Solages, Chair of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislative Caucus** stated. “I am proud to support parole reform in the Assembly, and I will continue to work with my colleagues in the BPHA legislative caucus to prioritize these bills.”

Luz Marquez Benbow, a co-founder of the National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault, founder of I am Negrx, and a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, said: “I've devoted my life in working in the mainstream sexual assault movement. We are making people disposable by putting them behind bars despite their transformation. As an abuse survivor, I acted out when I was young because I was angry and I could be behind bars right now just like anyone else. We need to believe in redemption. I as a survivor stand firmly with my brothers and sisters behind bars. I know the majority of people behind bars are also survivors of abuse. If you're a legislator, listen to the fact that we as survivors are calling for Fair and Timely and Elder Parole now. Not tomorrow, now. We deserve to be a more humane state.”

“Parole reform is all about second chances for those who have paid their debt to society. The goal of the Department of Corrections is correcting. Incarcerated individuals are capable of correcting their actions, their behavior, their lives. Those who truly have turned their lives around should be considered for parole without being considered a threat to public safety. For these individuals who used their time to successfully remake who they are, let's have them return

to their communities to be productive members of society. I have had the opportunity to speak with many returned citizens who have done just that. Not only have they turned their lives around, but many have made it their mission to help others do so as well,” **said Assemblymember Chris Burdick, who represents parts of Westchester, including the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for women.**

“I’ll be 68 years old this month. I’m a Suffolk County resident and was incarcerated for 31 years. The Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills matter to me because I was an aging person in prison, and was denied by the parole board five times. There should not only be a backward-looking, but also a forward-facing focus in our criminal justice system. To be permanently punished for past mistakes after a person is totally rehabilitated and ready to come home and contribute to society is a life and death situation, and prison is no place to die,” **said Daryl Tolbert, formerly incarcerated person and member of the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign.**

BACKGROUND:

- Recently, 40+ local houses of worship and faith leaders sent [a letter calling on Long Island’s five Democratic NY Senators](#) to support the Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills.
- 3 in 4 people from Long Island currently in a New York State prison are people of color and over 50% of incarcerated Long Islanders are Black people. 376 people from Long Island currently in a New York State prison are defined by NYS DOCCS as older adults, meaning they are aged 55 and older.
- 9 in 10 people from Westchester currently in a New York State prison are people of color and over 68% of incarcerated people from Westchester are Black people, despite the fact that less than 17% of Westchester residents are Black. 133 people from Westchester currently in a New York State prison are defined by NYS DOCCS as an older adult, meaning they are aged 55 and older.
- 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. Without reforms to the Parole Board and parole release process in New York State, New Yorkers, especially those who are Black and brown, will continue to age without dignity, get sick, and die in prison regardless of their transformation and potential benefits to outside communities.
- 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% of white people, compared to 34% of Black people and 33% 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 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 \(S.1415A/A.4231A\)](#) 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—LI, 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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