

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

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\*\*\*[Watch the full press conference here](#)\*\*\*

**AMID BUDGET DEFICITS, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR JUSTICE RELEASES NEW REPORT “UNLOCKING BILLIONS” ON MASSIVE SAVINGS FROM SLATE OF PENDING JUSTICE REFORMS**

*ACADEMICS, ADVOCATES & LEGISLATORS HIGHLIGHT FISCAL BENEFITS OF PASSING PAROLE REFORM, HALT SOLITARY CONFINEMENT ACT, MARIJUANA TAXATION AND REGULATION ACT, RESTORING COLLEGE IN PRISONS AND CLOSING PRISONS*

(New York) -- Today, experts from the Columbia University Center for Justice gathered with advocates and legislators to release a new report, [“Unlocking Billions: A Fiscal Analysis of Pending Justice Reforms in New York State,”](#) finding that a slate of policy changes would net the state an estimated \$1.52 billion annually, or \$15.2 billion over the next decade. Find the full report [here](#) and watch a full recording of the [press conference here](#). The economic fall-out from the COVID-19 pandemic has led to massive budget shortfalls and significant funding cuts to essential services at the exact time that such services are needed most. This report charts a path forward for policymakers.

**Cameron Rasmussen, Program Director of the Columbia Center for Justice**, said: “This report highlights a slate of legislation in New York State that will help to make our state less incarcerated, less criminalized and less punitive – and if passed, has the potential to unlock \$1.5 billion annually in state funds that can go towards what New Yorkers need most, like healthcare, housing and education.”

**NY Senate Crime, Crime Victims, and Correction Committee Chair Julia Salazar** said: “This report from Columbia University’s Center for Justice only helps to amplify the voices of those who are victims of mass incarceration. The report shows that we are not only denying New Yorkers their basic human rights, but doing so at great expense, finding massive savings if we were to grant access to TAP in prison, end solitary confinement, reform parole, legalize cannabis, and more. I am thankful for the support of the Center for Justice, and I look forward to working with the advocates and other organizers to win these reforms.”

**Jose Saldana, Director of the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign/RAPP**, said: "There is a crisis of aging and dying in New York State prisons, which are turning into substandard nursing homes, costing a fortune and benefiting no one. This ground-breaking report shows New York State can save billions by passing urgent justice reforms, including \$189 million every year from Elder Parole and \$333 million every year from Fair & Timely Parole. Now, it's up to our lawmakers to act."

**Jerome Wright, Statewide Organizer for the #HALTsolitary Campaign**, said: “The facts are clear. Solitary confinement is torture and it's costing us dearly in both lives and in much-needed funds. We're talking about dollars and cents when we should be talking about morals and what is right. People are being tortured in solitary for weeks, months, years and decades. Breaking them. Shattering them. Making COVID worse because people don't want to report symptoms for fear of being tortured as so-called medical isolation. The right and smart thing during this fiscal crisis is to stop spending money on torture and instead fund the services and support people need now more than ever.”

"New York has one shot to become a national leader in the fight for true marijuana justice by enacting a law with strong social equity and community reinvestment protections. There have been more than 800,000 arrests for low-level marijuana just in the last 25 years alone in New York, with extreme racial disparities. Legalization must be centered in providing comprehensive restitution to New Yorkers across the state who have been deeply harmed by prohibition. We urge swift passage of the Marijuana Reform and Taxation Act

(MRTA) to secure justice, jobs, and equity for the millions of New Yorkers that have borne the brunt of marijuana criminalization and restitution for the communities most harmed by the war on drugs. The Legislature and the Governor must cannabis in a way that will bring economic and racial justice to the communities that have been hit hardest by the war on drugs and COVID-19 in New York,” said **Melissa Moore, Drug Policy Alliance New York State Director.**

**Ivelisse Gilestra, Community Organizer at College & Community Fellowship,** said: "There is chronic poverty in Black and brown communities borne of government policies gutting them of resources. Pell grants in prison were banned in 1994 and in 1995 New York banned TAP for incarcerated students, causing a drastic drop in college in prison programs from over 70 to four. This created a deficit in preparing people for employability and navigating many changes upon release. This neglect can be rectified with educational equity and racial justice. When we are educated in prison, we come home to make wholesale positive change in our communities. It's time for New York to #TurnOntheTAP."

**Marvin Mayfield, Statewide Organizer at Center for Community Alternatives** said: “Because mass incarceration is a many-headed monster, no one bill or piece of legislation can - by itself - undo the harms of this system. That is why it is so urgent that each of the bills discussed today is brought together under the Justice Roadmap, a bold legislative agenda to decarcerate jails, prisons, and detention centers and ensure the basic dignity and core human rights of all New Yorkers. New York spent decades building up a system of mass incarceration and that is why we need transformative, multi-faceted legislation to undo this harm and help create the world we all deserve. The time is now. We do not have to choose between justice and fiscal responsibility. We can save money and lives by passing the Justice Roadmap.”

## **BACKGROUND:**

- *Unlocking Billions: A Fiscal Analysis of Pending Justice Reforms in New York State* finds slate of policy changes would net the state an estimated \$1.52 billion annually, or \$15.2 billion over the next decade.
  - The report finds that enacting Elder Parole and Fair Timely Parole would save \$522 million/year
  - HALT would save \$132 million/year
  - Closing additional prisons would save \$493.38 million/year
  - Restoring TAP for college access in prison would save \$22-27.5 million/year
  - Enacting the Marijuana Legalization & Taxation Act would generate \$350 million/year
- [\*SAVE MONEY, SAVE LIVES\*](#), a recent report by the Partnership for Public Good, finds that the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act (S.1623/A.2500) would save New York State and local governments an estimated \$132 million dollars annually, or [\\$1.3 billion dollars over 10 years](#).
- “Carceral Cash,” a report by Center for Community Alternatives found that New York spent [\\$18.2 billion](#) on the carceral system, including policing, jails, prisons, prosecutors, parole, and probation, in 2019. In contrast, New York state governments spent only \$6.2 billion on mental health services, public health, youth programs and services, recreation, and elder services combined.
- The five bills highlighted in the *Unlocking Billions* report are part of the [Justice Roadmap](#), a bold legislative agenda to decarcerate jails, prisons, and detention centers and ensure the basic human dignity and core human rights of all New Yorkers. The Justice Roadmap includes both criminal justice and immigrant justice legislation and is endorsed by over 200 organizations. The full list of bills included in the Justice Roadmap is available [here](#).

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