

****PRESS STATEMENT****

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RELEASE AGING PEOPLE IN PRISON CAMPAIGN RESPONDS TO ANNOUNCEMENT THAT NY STATE PRISONS WILL BEGIN VACCINATING INCARCERATED OLDER PEOPLE

In response to news that the New York State prison system will begin vaccinating incarcerated older people, aged 65 years and older, for COVID-19, **Release Aging People in Prison Campaign Community Leader Theresa Grady, whose husband is a currently incarcerated older person, released the following statement:**

“Allowing incarcerated older New Yorkers access to the COVID-19 vaccine is a good first step but more needs to be done. Because of decades of mistrust with prison health care and health care more generally in communities of color, there must be a robust plan for the State Health Department, or some other health agency that isn’t DOCCS to distribute, administer, and provide state of the art education associated with the vaccine and COVID-19.

Vaccine access must also be broadened to the entire incarcerated population, just like it is available for all corrections officers. Knowing that a robust plan will likely take months to go into effect, Governor Cuomo should immediately release those most vulnerable to this virus, which killed another incarcerated New Yorker just yesterday and is currently ripping through the entire system. Releasing incarcerated people is the preferred and most reliable public health measure to avoid COVID-19 related suffering and death in prison. Swift and immediate action is critical.”

BACKGROUND: The Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) announced on February 4, 2020—in response to a lawsuit rather than of their own volition—that they will begin vaccinating incarcerated people, aged 65 and older, for COVID-19. DOCCS reported this just hours after they announced another incarcerated New Yorker passed away with the virus at Franklin Correctional Facility on February 3. The number of incarcerated people who have tested positive for the virus has officially surpassed 5,000. At least 3,315 incarcerated people have tested positive for COVID-19 since December 4, which means more people have contracted the virus in the past two months than in the first nine months of the pandemic. There are currently outbreaks of the virus at Franklin, Attica, Bedford Hills, Bare Hill, Clinton, Woodbourne, Wyoming, Wende, Groveland, and Walsh Correctional Facilities.

Through nearly ten months of the pandemic, Governor Andrew Cuomo has granted a total of [ten clemencies](#) to New Yorkers in prison—fewer clemencies than governors in [California](#), [Illinois](#), [Oklahoma](#), [Kentucky](#), and other states across the country. Cuomo has refused to take action despite calls from [advocates](#), [attorneys](#), [family members of](#)

[people in prison](#), [public health experts](#), [Members of Congress](#), [district attorneys and philanthropists](#), [editorial boards](#), and [high profile celebrities](#) for him to grant wide-sweeping clemencies to people in prison in response to the pandemic. Instead of granting clemencies, Governor Cuomo has condemned thousands to solitary confinement, which [only exacerbates the harm](#) and spread of COVID-19. In addition, the Governor has yet to announce when he intends to offer vaccines to incarcerated New Yorkers, falling behind [the federal government](#) and neighboring [Connecticut, New Jersey, and Republican-led Massachusetts](#).

The Cuomo Administration has, to date, excluded incarcerated people who are predominately Black and brown from eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine while predominantly white prison staff are currently eligible.

There are many thousands of people in New York State prisons who are eligible for parole release, aged 50 and older, or imprisoned on a non-criminal technical parole violation, and/or within a year of their release date. As of October 2020, there were:

- 4,786 people who are already eligible for parole release
- 3,305 people held on technical parole violation
- 8,291 people aged 50 and older
- 7,955 within a year of max/conditional release (including 5 incarcerated mothers with infants housed in the Bedford Hills Corr. Facility nursery and one pregnant woman)

Advocates have called for lawmakers in Albany to pass three bills that will uniquely address this pandemic and prevent additional future tragedies:

- [Elder Parole](#) 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](#) would provide more meaningful parole reviews for incarcerated people who are already parole eligible.
- The [Humane Alternatives to Long-Term \(HALT\) Solitary Confinement Act](#) would end the torture of prolonged solitary confinement and replace it with more humane and effective alternatives while still allowing for true medical isolation as needed.

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