



MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT

May 7, 2021

Elder Parole
(S.15/A.3475)

Background

New York State has a moral and fiscal crisis of aging and dying in prisons due to decades of extremely harsh sentencing and a racially-biased parole system that values vengeance and endless punishment above redemption, personal transformation, healing, and safety.

Approximately 1,000 people have already died in New York prisons in the last decade and another 1,000 are currently sentenced to die behind bars in the coming years with no hope of release, no matter how much they have done to improve themselves and regardless of whether they pose a risk to public safety. Even as the state's overall prison population has declined, the percentage of incarcerated people who are older adults has dramatically increased. One-in-four are 50 or older.

The vast majority of people in prison are Black and Latinx people as a result of systemic racism in our country.

The grave injustice of New York's mass incarceration extends beyond the harm inflicted on individual people in prison. Tens of thousands of families across our state are missing one or more family members: children, parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. The terrible pain of losing a loved one in isolation amid COVID-19 without being able to say goodbye is sadly nearly always the case for incarcerated people and their families. Furthermore, New York spends an average of \$60,000 annually to incarcerate just one person, and between \$100,000 and \$240,000 annually per older adult in prison. This is money that should instead be invested in resources that deliver real community health and safety.

Elder Parole

New York must reform its parole system to provide hope for families across this state by passing Elder Parole (S.15-Hoylman / A.3475-De La Rosa). If passed, this bill would make people in prison aged 55 or older who have served at least 15 years eligible for individualized parole consideration. It is not a "blanket release" policy.

Rather, it would give people who have transformed themselves an opportunity to demonstrate their moral character before the Board of Parole and, subject to the Board's discretion, be released to their families and communities to live out their final years with dignity.

NYSPHA Recommends:

NYSPHA supports the Elder Parole act (S.15-Hoylman / A.3475-De La Rosa) and urges the legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, this bill. Ultimately, we support this bill because we value the worth and dignity of all people. We believe no one is disposable, nor should anyone be defined by the worst thing they've ever done. Further, no one, regardless of the harm they have caused, should die in prison. We believe in redemption and transformation. We believe in families, communities, and collective care. We also recognize that prison sentences that don't allow for meaningful opportunities for release don't keep us safe.

The New York State Public Health Association (NYSPHA) is an affiliate of the American Public Health Association and serves as a statewide organization for members from all disciplines in the public health spectrum including state and county health departments, healthcare; policy and advocacy organizations; community based health and human service programs and workers; academia and research.

Direct questions to advocacy@nyspha.org

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