

People's Campaign



Parole Justice

PAROLE JUSTICE IS GENDER JUSTICE

THE FACTS

- There are currently 1,138 people identified by NYS DOCCS as women incarcerated in New York, of whom 54.9% are people of color, Black, and/or Latinx (Source: Vera Institute of Justice).
- Nearly 1 in 5 women in NY State prisons (19%) are aged 50 or older.
- Women, gender non-conforming people, and transgender people are deeply impacted by parole injustice as part of a continuum of gender-based oppression. **Surveys show 95%** are survivors of trauma and abuse, often including sexual violence and intimate partner violence.
- In the survey in 2020 at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for women by The Correctional Association, **74% of 110 respondents** identified that they had witnessed some form of violence or abuse by staff, including physical, sexual, and verbal abuse, while 53% of respondents reported experiencing these acts of violence by staff themselves.
- Nearly half (46%) of all women are serving parole-eligible sentences, meaning the Parole Board will determine when they are free again (Source: Vera Institute of Justice). Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole would address these facts by giving women meaningful opportunities for release.
- 8 out of 10 incarcerated women are mothers and over 80,000 children have a parent who is incarcerated in a DOCCS facility (Source: Osborne Association, NY Initiative for Incarcerated Parents).
- Over 105,000 children have a parent in prison or jail on any given day (Source: OCFS).
- There were 1,400 babies born to women in prison in 2016 (Source: Women & Justice Project estimate based on data from Pregnancy in Prison Statistics and Association of State Correctional Administrators).
- Bedford Hills Correctional Facility's prison nursery allows infants to remain with their mothers to be given critical bonding, immune support and long-term health determinants for only up to 19 months.
- There are 102 people that DOCCS identifies as women currently eligible for parole (Source: Vera Institute of Justice).

THE LIVES WE'VE LOST

- In 2019, the longest-serving woman in New York State prison, Valerie Gaiter, **died of a misdiagnosed illness at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility at age 61** after 40 years in prison. She would not have been eligible for parole consideration for another decade, despite having completely transformed and turned her life around many years prior. She was repeatedly denied Clemency by Governor Cuomo.
- More recently, **Lulu Benson-Saey, a survivor of abuse, became the first woman to die of COVID-19 behind bars** in New York, also at age 61. She was repeatedly denied Clemency by Governor Cuomo.

WHY PAROLE JUSTICE

Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole would have given Valerie, Lulu and many others a meaningful opportunity for parole release consideration. Elder Parole would ensure that older people of all genders in prison aged 55 and up who have already served 15 years or more can appear before the Parole Board for an individualized assessment of their readiness for release. Fair & Timely Parole would ensure that such assessments, regardless of the person's age, are based on who a person is today, and not simply the worst thing they may have done, aligning parole release determinations with our common values of redemption and community safety.

Scholar and activist Mariame Kaba famously said that prison is not feminist. We know prisons perpetuate sexual violence and other trauma, racism, and other forms of oppression.

Tragic accounts of sexual assault by staff and other abuses abound. This abuse is exacerbated in NYS women's facilities and across the prison system, where many people are made invisible by DOCCS' inability to recognize their gender, as well as people who cannot disclose their gender identity for reasons of safety.

We believe that parole justice is gender justice because it will reduce the number of people subjected to such horrors, reunite families and communities, and bring a measure of healing to neglected survivors of violence.