

People's Campaign



Parole Justice

PAROLE JUSTICE IS RACIAL JUSTICE

The criminal justice system is a modern manifestation of the racial caste system in the United States, incurring the nickname “The New Jim Crow,” and the parole system is no exception. From arrest to pretrial detention and sentencing to parole, racial bias is present at every stage of this system. It’s long past time we make this right, and parole justice can help us get there.

- Black New Yorkers represent roughly 15% of the State’s population, but nearly 50% of people in State prisons.
- New York’s parole system has a long documented history of racial bias in parole hearings and parole release decisions, meaning the already disproportionately large number of Black and Latinx incarcerated people is much less likely to be granted parole than White people.
- In 2016, a New York Times investigation revealed a “scourge of racial bias” in New York prisons, including a long history of racial disparities in Parole Board determinations . The investigation found, for example, that Black people were released at their first Parole Board hearing 15% of the time, compared to 25% for their white counterparts. Governor Andrew Cuomo’s only response was to announce yet another investigation, plus the addition of “diverse” members to the Parole Board. This did not stop racial disparities, which continue to this day. Moreover, there is no evidence or indication that the investigation yielded any policy changes, and it is not clear whether it even happened.
- To this day, a white person in a New York prison is significantly more likely on average to be released on parole than a Black or Latinx person and the disparity widened in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a Times Union analysis of the nearly 19,000 parole board decisions over the last two years. The data, which spans October 2018 through October 2020, shows the Parole Board granted parole release to 41 percent of white people, compared to 34 percent of Black people and 33 percent of Latinx people.
- Parole Justice will expand access to meaningful parole release opportunities to thousands of Black and Latinx people in New York, and begin the work of reconnecting families and communities separated by mass incarceration.

FAIR & TIMELY PAROLE

- The Fair & Timely Parole Act (S1415/A.4231) would create a more fair parole determination process that looks to who a person is today.
- At present, Parole Commissioners often deny a person’s release based solely on their crime of conviction, and thousands of Black people have been repeatedly denied release for this reason alone, despite their growth, transformation, and achievements in a prison system riddled with racism and designed to oppress rather than rehabilitate.
- The racial disparities that exist in New York’s parole release system can never be addressed unless the law is changed.

ELDER PAROLE

- The Elder Parole bill (S15/A.3475) would create opportunities for a parole hearing for people 55 and over and who served at least 15 years.
- Valerie Gaiter and Benjamin Smalls are two examples of Black elders who died in 2019 and 2020, respectively, before they ever had any opportunity for release, despite their change, transformation, and positive contributions to their peers and the community as a whole. . They are two of the many Black elders who would be assets to their communities but were lost too soon. Elder Parole would have made it possible for Valerie and Benjamin to go before the Parole Board before they passed.