

People's Campaign



Parole Justice

EXPANDING PATHWAYS TO HOPE, HEALING & ACCOUNTABILITY

What Victims and Survivors Say

Survivors' needs and beliefs about criminal justice are as varied and diverse as survivors themselves. However, in *Crime Survivors Speak*, a 2016 [report](#) published by the Alliance for Safety and Justice, more than 60% of survivors indicated that they favor shorter prison sentences and more spending on prevention and rehabilitation programs, including education, mental health treatment, and drug treatment.

In 2017, the [Downstate Coalition for Crime Victims](#), an interdisciplinary group of survivors and advocates in New York State, developed [a new vision for crime victims](#) based upon their own experiences and the needs and hopes shared with them by the people they served. They learned that many survivors want: safety for themselves and for their communities; racial justice and an end to the racial inequities which contribute to and exacerbate their traumas; interventions to stop cycles of violence, and to ensure that the people who harmed them will not cause harm in the future; accountability from people who perpetrate of harm; and recognition from their communities that what happened to them was wrong.

In its present form, the criminal justice system does not meet these needs. In many ways, the system exacerbates the harm done to victims and survivors, especially but not only those directly impacted by incarceration. That is why many victim and survivor advocacy organizations, including the New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault and the Crime Victims Treatment Center, support the Elder Parole (S15/A3475) and Fair & Timely (S1415/A4231) Parole bills to make more people in prison eligible for individualized parole release consideration and to make such consideration based on how they have demonstrated personal transformation and low probability of recidivism.

Crime Survivors Impacted by Mass Incarceration

Survivors and people impacted by mass incarceration are not two distinct groups. There are many survivors who have loved ones in prison, many survivors who have been criminalized for acts they have committed in the process of surviving violence, and many survivors who are incarcerated now, trying to heal from violence and abuse within the inhumane environment of our prisons.

Most people entering prisons and jails have experienced violence and abuse prior to their incarceration. **Surveys show that nearly 60% of people incarcerated in women's prisons, and as many as 94% of some women's prison populations, are survivors of violence, including sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and child abuse.**

While there have been fewer studies asking about the trauma histories of people incarcerated in men's prisons, we know that, sadly, such histories are common there as well.

Violence and abuse are also prevalent behind bars. **In a survey conducted in 2020 by the Correctional Association of New York at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, 74% of 110 respondents indicated 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.**

Incarcerated survivors have limited access to the types of healing services available to the non-incarcerated survivor population. Many incarcerated survivors, whether they have experienced trauma prior to or during their incarceration, often report that fears about safety and confidentiality prevent them from accessing those supports which are available.

At the same time, the parole system is riddled with inequities and limited by external political pressures that prevent incarcerated survivors from gaining access to parole release, even when they have served their minimum sentences and have demonstrated that they are extremely unlikely to repeat behaviors that originally brought them into conflict with the law.

The parole system thus contributes to the prolonged incarceration of survivors – predominantly Black and Latinx people – and the continued separation of families across New York.

Survivor Justice & Parole Justice

When the parole process includes recognition of the transformational growth of incarcerated people, it also creates spaces for healing and accountability. We understand healing and accountability to be different for each survivor, but recognize them at their core as active processes in which we center the needs of victims/survivors, strategize how we will meet those needs, identify internal strengths and resiliency practices that move us forward, and seek external support to disrupt cycles of trauma and violence. Endless punishment poses a systemic barrier to healing and accountability. Moreover, it ignores the diversity of needs of survivors of violence and trauma, compounds the trauma suffered by incarcerated survivors, and takes necessary resources away from community safety. Instead, we want healing and care for all survivors, opportunities for meaningful accountability for people who have committed violence and harm, and investments in community-led initiatives to prevent and respond to violence. Parole reform which expands access to release will move us towards these goals.

Elder Parole (S15/A3475) and Fair & Timely (S1415/A4231) will:

- Expand pathways to hope, healing, and meaningful accountability that are not accessible within New York's prisons;
- Reduce the number of people incarcerated in New York, reuniting families and communities across the state; and
- Enable New York to invest in prevention, rehabilitation, and re-entry programs, particularly community-led initiatives to prevent and respond to violence with an estimated \$522 million in annual cost savings, according to [Unlocking Billions](#), a Columbia University Center for Justice analysis.