

April 1, 2020

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor of New York State  
New York State Capital Building  
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Governor Cuomo,

Thank you for your strong leadership during the Coronavirus pandemic. New Yorkers look to your bold yet humane efforts with true admiration. As lead organizations in New York's arts-in-corrections community—whose staff and volunteers work directly with incarcerated people—we urge you to release older and immune-compromised men and women who are incarcerated in New York's state correctional facilities. Just as you have spoken compassionately of our seniors and other vulnerable populations during this time of crisis, we ask that you act to help avoid a potential toll that the virus will take in crowded correctional facilities.

We join an urgent wave of concern—expressed in letters to you from the Governor's Reentry Council, the members of Fair and Just Prosecution (whose signatories include New York prosecutors Cyrus Vance, Eric Gonzalez, David Soares and David Clegg), Assembly Corrections Committee Chair David Weprin and others—in asking you to explore all available means to reduce the prison population during this COVID crisis. Decreasing the density in correctional facilities will make it safer for all who remain incarcerated as well as for the workforce in the prisons.

While we applaud your recent release of over 1,000 people incarcerated for technical violations, we urge you to also release many of the older and vulnerable adults in DOCCS facilities by utilizing the multiple strategies advocated by Assemblyman Weprin and your Reentry Council:

- Clemency, especially for those with already outstanding applications who are also in a high-risk category of contracting COVID-19
- Medical furloughs for those whose healthcare needs would be better served in the community
- Advancing parole consideration for the elderly incarcerated, especially for those who have scheduled reappearances in the next four months
- Using executive authority to commute the sentences of individuals who are scheduled to be released within the next four months to be released within the next four days
- Releasing people who are granted parole with approved release plans within four days rather than the current 30-45 day window
- Permitting parole grants without an in-person or video appearance, based on administrative review of files

The above recommendations are supported by the collective pledge of thirteen non-profit organizations on your Reentry Council to "stand ready to provide the

necessary services and supports that would ensure that every individual released in response to the current crisis is connected to one of their organizations or to colleagues in the nonprofit, faith, housing and healthcare sectors who are best positioned to meet their needs."

We are grateful for your fierce advocacy in support of the most vulnerable New Yorkers during this spreading pandemic, and we trust that your empathy and sense of humanity will extend to the at-risk population inside the walls.

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