



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Invest in what truly works to improve community safety

SAMRA G. BROUK | April 28, 2025

improve community safety

By SAMRA BROUK | April 26, 2025



Currently, our prison system focuses only on punishment without considering its long-term consequences. Instead, we need to find ways to enable incarcerated people to grow and change. As chair of the Senate Mental Health Committee, I recognize that when we help individuals heal, we make our communities safer places to live.

We must support New Yorkers with mental health crises by connecting them to programming and treatment, acknowledging their positive transformation, and enabling them to rejoin their communities once they're ready.

Not to mention **incarceration is expensive**, leaving less money for **research-backed solutions**: access to housing, mental health and substance use treatment, education, and employment.

As the **brutal deaths of Robert Brooks** and **Messiah Nantwi** make clear, incarceration can be traumatizing and deadly. People often come out worse than they went in, making all New Yorkers less safe.

Our policies must deliver safety and accountability, giving incarcerated people tools to positively change their lives and stop further harm.

Passing the **Earned Time** and **Second Look** acts will give people the opportunity to earn time off their sentences for participation in work programs, mental health or substance use treatment, vocational training, and more. Incentivizing participation will better prepare people for release while reducing violent incidents in Department of Corrections and Community Supervision facilities and lowering the prison population—**all while improving community safety**.

Passing the **Fair and Timely Parole Act** will prompt commissioners to evaluate who a parole-seeker is now—the ways they have taken accountability for their actions and prepared to return to society—**rather than who they were years or even decades ago**. That means more safety and justice for New York.

These bills are also essential to making our system more rehabilitative. As of 2021, **24 percent of incarcerated New Yorkers** had some form of mental illness—that number has likely increased since. Yet some leaders are condemning efforts to safely shrink the prison population or to make our criminal justice system fairer. They are using fearmongering to keep people behind bars, even when doing so no longer serves New Yorkers' safety.

New York needs to follow the evidence and invest in what works. When we double down on punishment, we miss the opportunity to invest in our communities, promote healing, and encourage the rehabilitation and growth that keeps New Yorkers safe.

(Op-ed originally published in the Rochester Beacon by Senator Samra Brouk)