



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Criminal Justice Must Be Justice For All

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Now that the Senate, Assembly and Governor's office are controlled by one party, the scales of justice in New York have tipped in favor of offenders over crime victims, families and communities. Not only is this unconscionable, this imbalance is against the best interests of public safety. It must stop.

Along with my Republican colleagues, I proposed a Victims' Justice Agenda, to reform our parole system, one that is eroding under current state leadership. We have recently seen cop-killer Herman Bell not only receive parole, but also get back his right to vote while on parole.

Another 25,000 parolees have also been granted blanket pardons by Governor Cuomo.

Most recently, the board granted Judith Clark parole following Governor Cuomo's commutation of her sentence despite her participation in a Brinks heist that resulted in the deaths of two police officers.

As a former member of the Parole Board, I have wrestled with decisions to hold and release inmates. Each case is unique, and the law requires the board to consider not only the behavior of the inmate, but also whether the release will deprecate the seriousness of the crime or undermine respect for the law.

Clearly, the severity of Clark's actions failed to be taken into consideration, and the life-long anguish of three families who lost their loved ones seems to be an afterthought for those who applauded the decision.

The new Senate Majority is now using her case to advocate for more leniency for criminals by granting parole hearings to any inmate who has served 15 years or more once the individual has reached age 55. This would make serial killer, David Berkowitz, the Son of Sam, eligible for parole every two years.

This new call for more lenient parole, even as the Parole Board moves in favor of cop killers, comes on the heels of bail and discovery changes made unilaterally in March. Despite warning from a bipartisan range of law enforcement officials to prosecutors, this was done without holding a single hearing. The new Majority continues to ignore the learned opinions of law enforcement professionals.

Meanwhile, crime victims feel silenced and ignored. Take for example, the two dozen police widows who came to learn that 800,000 letters opposing the release of their husbands' killers were not received by the Parole Board. My legislation in the Victims' Justice Agenda would

require the Parole Board to consider these third party letters.

Other parts of the 11-bill package include easing the parole process for victims and their families, extending the amount of time between parole hearings, allowing family to videotape statements for every parole board member to view before a decision and eliminating the possibility of parole for first degree murder convictions.

Victims deserve a greater voice and greater rights in the criminal justice process, not a lesser one or else this system will fail those it is charged to protect.