



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Zellnor Myrie

Senator Myrie: Fifty Years After Attica, It's Past Time for Answers

ZELLNOR MYRIE September 9, 2021

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"We are men! We are not beasts and we do not intend to be beaten or driven as such. The entire prison populace, that means each and every one of us here, have set forth to change forever the ruthless brutalization and disregard for the lives of the prisoners here and throughout the United States. What has happened here is but the sound before the fury of those who are oppressed. We will not compromise on any terms except those terms that are agreeable to us. We've called upon all the conscientious citizens of America to assist us in putting an end to this situation that threatens the lives of not only us, but of each and every one of you, as well."

—Statement read on September 9, 1971 by Elliott James "L.D." Barkley, a person incarcerated at Attica who was later killed during the violent re-capture of the prison

Senator Zellnor Y. Myrie today released the following statement on the 50th anniversary of the Attica Uprising:

"Fifty years ago, incarcerated people at the Attica Correctional Facility took control of the prison in an effort to bring attention to demands for humane and fair conditions. Over the course of the next four days, 29 prisoners and 10 prison employees were killed and nearly 90 others were wounded.

"Subsequently, a grand jury reviewed evidence and handed down 42 indictments— every one of them against incarcerated people. That none of the corrections officers or other law enforcement involved in the Attica violence would be criminally charged is both shocking and sadly unsurprising. This episode was yet another instance of police being allowed to evade accountability for violence, especially against people of color. This grim tradition continues today, in cases such as those of Eric Garner, Breonna Taylor, Tamir Rice and Daniel Prude. **And as recent reporting on incidents of self-harm, violence and unchecked COVID spread at Rikers Island shows**, New York has moved far too slowly to treat the incarcerated with the dignity and humanity everyone deserves.

"While a half century has now passed since the Attica Uprising, its scars are still fresh for the survivors and their families, both the formerly incarcerated and prison staff. The only way to learn from our past is by confronting information from Attica and other historically important events. **That is why I have introduced S.316-A**, which would give the courts a roadmap to consider whether, and when, to release the records from grand jury proceedings involving public officers or employees, such as police and corrections officers. This bill would make it easier for people to request records that may help us learn truths in our history, and give courts more reasons to grant those requests.

"Earlier this year, I was honored to speak with Arthur "Bobby" Harrison, an incarcerated person who was at Attica in 1971. His words were powerful and his memories were raw. Our legislation would honor him and the many others impacted by the Attica Uprising, by helping us learn the painful lessons of our past in an effort to ensure a stronger, fairer future."