

TESTIMONY OF ROBERT BROOKS TO THE MAY 14 JOINT LEGISLATIVE HEARING

My name is Robert Lee Ricks. I am the father of Robert Lee Brooks, who was murdered by New York State corrections staff on December 9 at the Marcy Correctional facility.

As I have said before, I truly believe that my son died so that others may live. And you in this room have the power to see that my son did not die in vain.

The system that has tolerated and enabled the epidemic of violence against prisoners in New York's prisons and jails for decades must change. You have seen the videotape of my son being brutally beaten to death by corrections officers, while nurses and other DOCCS staff looked on and did nothing to stop them. I am asking you today to commit to passing real reform before this legislative session ends in June.

I want to call your attention to the Robert Brooks Agenda for Justice, which is being distributed here today. It is a list of 9 bills that would bring about meaningful change to this broken system.

The primary focus of the Agenda for Justice is transparency and accountability. It will strengthen both the State Commission on Corrections and the Correctional Association of New York so that they can provide meaningful [oversight](#). It will enable more prisoners to file civil actions against abusive staff without fear of reprisals. It will install more cameras in prisons, reducing the number of "dead zones".

Most importantly. One of the bills in the Agenda for Justice, S 1671/A5355, would make it much easier for DOCCS to discipline correctional staff that assault prisoners. Between 2010 and 2022, DOCCS sought to terminate corrections staff for abusing prisoners in 290 cases. It is shocking that this number is so low, but it is even more shocking that, at the end of its opaque process, DOCCS was only able to terminate 28 officers.

An op ed column published in The Albany Times Union last month by my friend and counsel, Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, exposed the fact that DOCCS does not have a functional system of discipline for corrections staff. I urge you all to read it.

Finally, I know this to be true at a personal level. If DOCCS had an effective system of investigating and disciplining corrections staff, officers who had already been credibly accused of abuse by other prisoners would not have been on duty on December 9 to participate in the murder of my son.

I urge you to take action to repair this broken system now.

Thank you.

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