

# A Vision for Safety & Justice





**RAPP is an organizing and legislative advocacy organization that works on ending mass incarceration and promoting racial justice through the release from prison of older and aging people and those serving long and life sentences. We are particularly focused on ending the mass incarceration of aging/elderly folks in the New York State Prison system. RAPP challenges a fundamental pillar of mass incarceration: reliance on a system of permanent punishment, a racist culture of retribution and revenge rather than rehabilitation and healing. We mobilize currently and formerly incarcerated people, their families, and other concerned community members.**

**We also partner with victim & survivor advocates to fight for our vision of safety rooted in promoting dignity and meeting people's needs.**

**Our Campaigns:**

- **People's Campaign for Parole Justice**
- **Hochul Bring Them Home (Clemency)**
- **Rights Behind Bars (Conditions)**

# Overview of People's Campaign for Parole Justice



## ***Who are we?***

RAPP helps lead People's Campaign for Parole Justice—a grassroots coalition, which was started by 15 organizations across New York State and works to promote fair and meaningful release opportunities for incarcerated people in New York State prisons.



***The primary goals of our campaign are family reunification and promoting racial justice.***

We believe no one is disposable, nor should anyone be forever defined by the worst thing they've ever done.

We believe in redemption and transformation.

We believe in families, communities, and collective care.



# Overview of The People's Campaign for Parole Justice

- Grassroots statewide campaign organizing to win pathways for people in prison to be considered, on a case-by-case basis, for release.
- Backed by 350+ groups across the state, including crime victim and survivor advocates like the Crime Victims Treatment Center here in NYC, older adult services providers like JASA, public defenders and District Attorneys, organized labor, and more.



# BACKGROUND

## Facts:

- Because of extreme sentences and repeated parole denials, New York has a crisis of aging, sickness, and death behind bars.
- It costs New York State (and by extension taxpayers) between \$100,000 and \$240,000 annually to keep aging folks incarcerated
- 1 in 4 New Yorkers in prison is serving a life sentence, which includes 1,000 people serving life without the possibility of parole and other equivalent sentences.
- Investigations by the NY Times and Albany Times Union have found racism permeates the sentencing and parole processes meaning that Black, Brown and Latino/x NYers are far more likely to be sentenced to lengthy terms of imprisonment and less likely to be released



# The People's Campaign for Parole Justice

## Campaign Platform:

The People's Campaign for Parole Justice is calling on New York State lawmakers and Governor Hochul to enact a package of comprehensive reforms that promote justice and safe communities:

- **Elder Parole:** Allows incarcerated older adults who have served 15 or more years of their current sentence to be considered by the Parole Board, on a case-by-case basis, for release.
- **Fair and Timely Parole:** Restores the Parole Board to its original purpose of evaluating people's readiness for release and whether they pose a risk, rather than denying them again and again based solely on the one thing they can never change – their conviction. The Board could still factor in the conviction, but it could not be the sole or primary reason for a denial of release when a person has transformed their life.
- **A Fair and Fully Staffed Parole Board:** The Parole Board must be staffed with 19 commissioners as the law allows, and should be comprised of people who share our values of redemption, transformation and mercy. There are currently only 14 Board members.





## ***Protecting community safety...***

**A recent peer-reviewed article in the Journal of Quantitative Criminology found: “We conservatively estimate that the Board could have more than doubled the release rate without increasing the total or violent felony arrest rate, and that they could have achieved these gains while simultaneously eliminating racial disparities in release rates.”**





## ***...and improving community safety***

- **Bringing home parents, grandparents, mentors, violence interrupters, counselors & future non-profit leaders will improve safety.**
- **Passing Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole are estimated to save \$522/year – money that could be reallocated toward what actually improves safety, as well as material support for victims and survivors**

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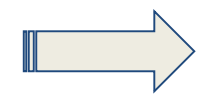
# Advocates push for three bills to end cycle of violence

by: [Amal Tlaige](#)  
Posted: Apr 25, 2022 / 05:01 PM EDT  
Updated: Apr 25, 2022 / 05:02 PM EDT





# NYS Prison Population Facts



## ***New York's Prison Population***

- There are 44 state prisons across New York with roughly 31,500 incarcerated people
- Racial Disparities in Incarceration Rates: Nearly half of the people in NY prisons are Black (47.9%) and roughly three-quarters are People of Color. This is a result of centuries of oppression and deliberate policies.





# NYS Prison Conditions



## **STAFF VIOLENCE**

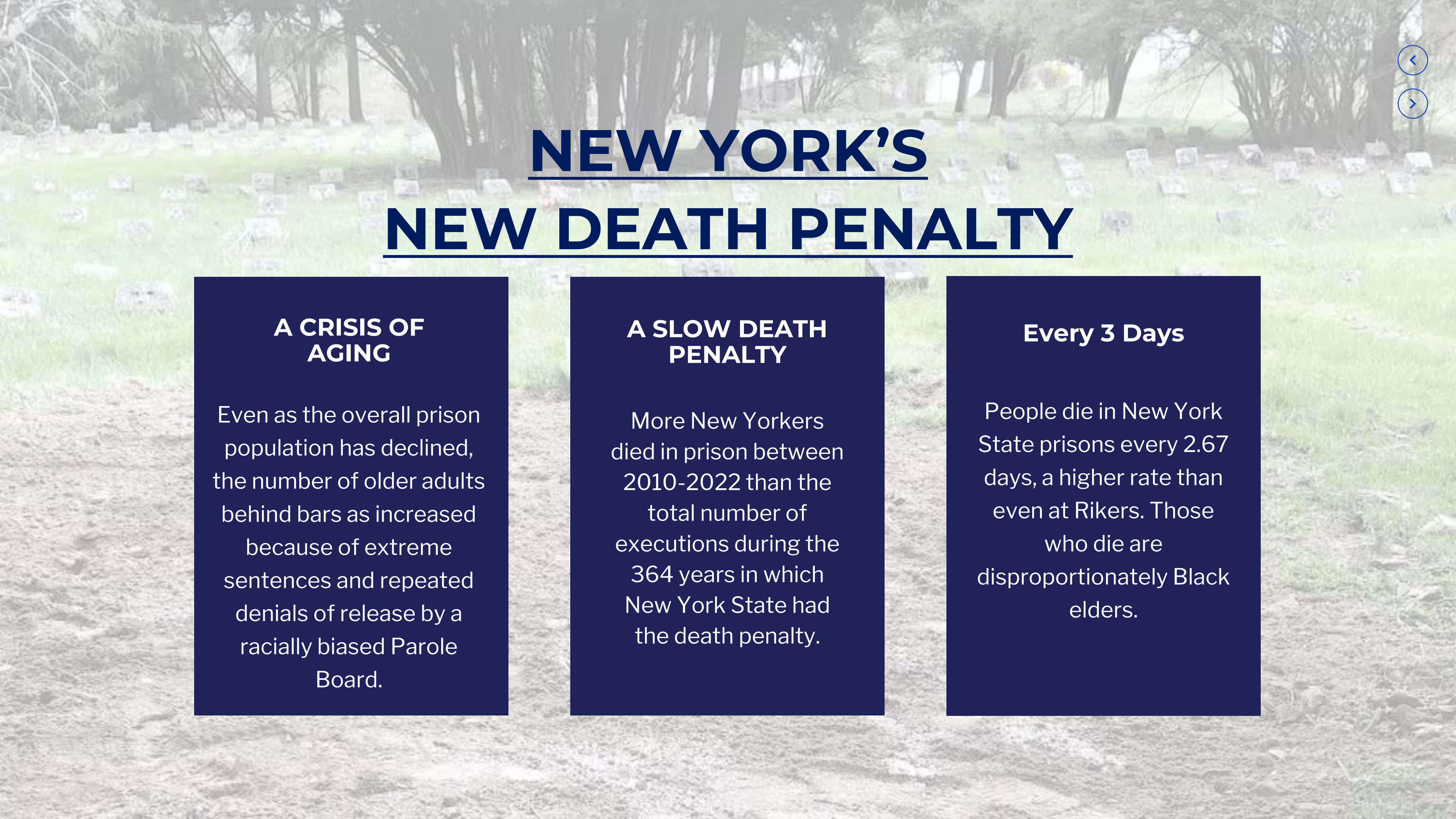
Prisons are supposedly intended to help enforce the law, but in reality, power dynamics, racism, and a lack of accountability breed lawlessness on the part of staff, who engage in wanton brutality and other cruelties.

## **LACK OF MEDICAL CARE & BASIC ACCOMMODATIONS**

People in prison needed medical support may be sent to actual veterinarians. Healthcare is atrocious. Also, guards often exploit people's infirmities for harsher punishment, rather than accommodate them.

## **Prison Slavery**

People in prison are forced to work all manner of jobs, including building furniture used by lawmakers, for pennies per hour, starting at just 16 cents.



# NEW YORK'S NEW DEATH PENALTY

## **A CRISIS OF AGING**

Even as the overall prison population has declined, the number of older adults behind bars has increased because of extreme sentences and repeated denials of release by a racially biased Parole Board.

## **A SLOW DEATH PENALTY**

More New Yorkers died in prison between 2010-2022 than the total number of executions during the 364 years in which New York State had the death penalty.

## **Every 3 Days**

People die in New York State prisons every 2.67 days, a higher rate than even at Rikers. Those who die are disproportionately Black elders.

# The Parole Process: What is it and how does it work?



## *Prison Sentences*

- There are two types of prison sentences
  - determinate (a fixed number of years)
  - indeterminate (a range of years, for example 1-3 years or 25 years to life).
- Parole is the system by which people serving indeterminate sentences obtain release
- Once those serving indeterminate sentences have reached their minimum sentence (e.g. 25 years on a 25-life sentence), they become eligible for parole.
- This is not “early release”, but instead an opportunity for people to serve the remainder of their sentence at home under parole supervision.



# Parole Release in New York State

- **The Parole Board which is housed under the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision is responsible for having 11,000 parole hearing interviews ever year with roughly 60 hearings per day**
- **The Parole Board can be staffed with up to 19 commissioners however as of today, there are only 14 commissioners on the Board**
- **Racism, white supremacy, and other systems of oppression permeate the parole process. Black people are profoundly and disproportionately impacted as they are significantly less likely to be granted parole release than their similarly situated white counterparts**
- **The Board acts illegally as a de facto resentencing body and often adds years or even decades onto people's' court-imposed minimum sentences simply due to the nature of a person's conviction--the one thing they can't change.**



# Aging People in New York Prisons

- New York DOCCS classifies a person as an "older adult" when they reach 55
- Prison Policy Initiative has found that each year served in prison takes **2 years off** an individual's life expectancy. Most people in prison die of age-related illnesses such as cancer and heart disease in their mid-late fifties
- New York spends between \$100,000 and \$240,000 annually on keeping aging people incarcerated
- Older people, especially those who have been convicted of serious crimes, have the lowest recidivism rates of any age cohort, posing little, if any risk to public safety



# Parole Justice Legislative Priorities



- ***Why we need to pass Fair & Timely Parole:***

- Thousands of people are languishing in prison years and decades beyond their minimum sentences because of repeated parole denials.
- The Parole Board denies release to the majority of the roughly 11,000 incarcerated people they interview every year.
- A person's freedom should be based on the present, not solely on their past.

- ***Why we need to pass Elder Parole:***

- There are roughly 1,000 older New Yorkers who have already spent decades in prison but aren't yet eligible for any opportunity to return to their communities.
- More than 1,000 people are serving Life Without Parole or virtual life without parole (a sentence of 50 years to life or more) sentences. They are guaranteed to die in prison without this provision.
- Many older people serving life in prison have transformed their lives. They statistically pose the least risk to public safety, have the lowest recidivism rates across all age cohorts, and often benefit communities upon their release by mentoring young people and interrupting violence.

# How to Take Action for Parole Justice

How you can take action to support Parole Justice

1. Join our campaign: <https://rappcampaign.com/join-our-work/>
2. Donate: <https://rappcampaign.com/donate/>
3. Call legislative leaders & urge them to call a vote on the Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills.

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**ASSEMBLY SPEAKER CARL HEASTIE - (518) 455-3791**

