



**Testimony of the Osborne Association
to the
New York State Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Public Protection**

February 12, 2020

**Presented by
Elizabeth Gaynes
President/CEO**

Bronx Headquarters

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am the President of the Osborne Association, a New York nonprofit founded 90 years ago by Thomas Mott Osborne, an Auburn mayor and businessman from a family of abolitionists and suffragettes who served as warden of Sing Sing in 1914 and became known as the “pioneer and prophet of prison reform.”

I am sure he would be both saddened and proud of how the organization he founded has grown. Sad because of how mass incarceration has swelled the prison system, and proud of the programs and services we have designed and implemented to bring the population down and provide opportunities for those on both sides of the walls. Today, the Osborne Association has community sites in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Harlem, Newburgh, and Buffalo. In addition, Osborne operates programs for 30 DOCCS facilities, including 16 Visitor Hospitality Centers welcoming 80,000 visitors a year, 5 Family Centers in prison visiting rooms, and soon our Supportive Video Visiting will connect children and families to loved ones in 10 facilities, including all three women’s prisons. Our programs operate in all 9 DOCCS hubs, and in 19 upstate counties.

It is likely clear from that recitation of programs that Osborne is unique among major criminal justice nonprofit organizations in that we center the children and families of incarcerated men and women in our programs and advocacy, while having the largest presence in prisons. Therefore we see firsthand that increasingly, the people Osborne serves in our prison-based programs – visitors as well as incarcerated people – are from outside New York City. They are from Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Utica, Albany, Lower and Mid-Hudson Valley and increasingly are from more rural parts of the state where arrests related to addiction have not decreased to the degree they have in NYC. In fact, the majority of admissions to DOCCS are no longer from NYC.

As an aside, I want to mention that although new admissions may come from outside NYC, the greatest single concentration of those incarcerated – and their children and families – do live “downstate.” And yet a disproportionate number of prison closures have affected facilities in NYC. The recent closure of Lincoln is inexplicable. You are being asked by the Governor to approve future closures with little notice and more importantly, with no role in the decision of which of our dozens of prisons ought to be closed. Given that the choice is clearly political, we might as well have politicians participate openly in the decision, both in terms of which facility to close and how to re-purpose it to benefit the communities most affected.

While prison closures are evidence of decarceration, and New York has seen considerable success in reducing the prison population through more sensible diversion, the core of the population remains stubbornly persistent due to continued extreme sentencing and low parole release rates rooted in the seemingly permanent punishment paradigm. The percentage of

people in state prison serving life and virtual life sentences is among the highest in the country, and leads us to a crisis of aging in prison – an unforced error given that older adults serving long sentences are the most expensive to incarcerate, pose the lowest risk to public safety and have done the most to grapple with the consequences of the harm they caused.

Osborne has geared its program to address both the challenges of children with arrested and incarcerated parents, and the impact of aging in prison and reentry; our policy center, for good reason, is the Center on Justice Across Generations. This is why, as we describe in more detail in the appendix of this testimony, we are seeking your support to protect and expand access to people in prison and jail for their children and families, why we are asking your renewed support for our recent program expansion to Western New York launched last year with funding from Senator Tim Kennedy, and why we are requesting new funding for our Elder Reentry Initiative. We also join with our colleagues in the ATI/Reentry Coalition, the RAPP campaign, and others in support of the Fair and Timely Parole bill and the Elder Parole bill that would enable aging boomers – many of whom were children when they committed the crime for which they are incarcerated – to be considered for discretionary release ahead of their regular parole date.

New York has provided leadership on issues facing older adults. I recently attended a forum sponsored by Senator Liz Krueger about including Older Women’s Issues in the feminist agenda. And I know that those in the Aging field are asking for support in addressing the shortage of aides in NY and the unmet need for in-home aide services. Might I suggest that many incarcerated men and women are providing compassionate care for their peers in various medical units within DOCCS, and – if the field paid fair wages – would be a great resource if barriers were further lifted. Given the difficulty of finding adequate release plans for many Longtermers who have grown old in prison and need more supportive housing options – how about supporting a funding stream for residential care outside of prison walls – staffed by people who have offered care during their incarceration. It would certainly be less expensive and more compassionate than providing elder care in prison, and might even reduce the number of people incarcerated past their release dates. (Yes, that’s a thing.) Our Elder Reentry Initiative, which provides geriatric assessments and discharge plans for older incarcerated adults is currently operating on a somewhat unstable combo of private, City and federal funds but could expand well beyond its current size with state support.

As members of the ATI/Reentry Coalition, we support other budgetary and policy initiatives. But unfortunately, the reaction to your wise reforms in the area of bail and discovery last year – ranging from misleading to disgusting – leads me to focus now on an issue that I thought we had put to bed a year ago. This is not unfamiliar territory, and it requires us to recall that other

big reforms – repealing the worst of the Rockefeller Drug Laws and Raising the Age (to name just two) were also fought bitterly by many of the same forces – whether it’s privately held companies (including bail bondsmen) who might lose profits, Sheriffs who might lose lucrative jail stays, DAs who saw their virtually unbridled power checked. It’s important to remember that in the case of bail reform, if the judges, DAs and police had actually followed the prior law and set reasonable bail based on ability to pay and risk of flight, we probably wouldn’t be here having this conversation today. I am not suggesting the law – any law – is perfect; NY did not do enough to help counties shift their resources in a way that would move the locus of connecting arrested people to needed services and treatment from the jail to the community. Releasing a person to services and/or supervision has long been shown to be more effective in assuring appearance than posting bail. And it has certainly been shown to lead to much better outcomes than for those detained pretrial, who are less likely to prevail and more likely to lose homes, jobs, health, mental health, and families.

By the way, there is a mountain of evidence to support the claims I just made. You know what has NO evidence behind it? The Police Commissioner and the Mayor of the state’s largest city claiming that bail reform is responsible for a spike in crime. Literally NOT ONE PIECE OF DATA. In fact, in every story I have seen in newspapers around the state, the conclusions are based solely on the opinion of a sheriff, DA, or occasionally a judge who thinks his so-called discretion has been limited. Neither the President of the United States nor judges have unlimited discretion and never did. And when anyone actually does check out the stories of those ginning up fear, we often find quite another story. For example, one article went nuts over a judge “forced” to release someone on a negligent homicide auto – never revealing that the same judge had previously released another defendant with the same circumstances long before there was bail reform. Other articles claim that someone released on a misdemeanor without bail was re-arrested – for panhandling, not exactly the makings of a crime spike. And worse, it ignores the fact that the law does actually provide for a different option when a person commits a crime or fails to appear post-release.

I think we can all agree that it does not lend credibility to the attacks on discovery law reforms either when a sheriff on Long Island – maybe hoping to influence an election – claimed that a witness/victim had been murdered because the DA was forced to provide the defense with the witness’s name. By the way, this witness, according to the newspaper article, was experiencing homelessness, which gives you a good idea of how far the prosecutor was going to protect his witnesses. Of course the facts got in the way, and the assertion was retracted, but not before it showed how much fake news is out there.

We also hope that the Senate will sustain our new program in Western New York. FamilyWorks Buffalo received FY 19-20 funding from Senator Kennedy and was designed to provide support to children of arrested and incarcerated parents, including video visiting, youth services, and training of local organizations on the impact of parental incarceration. While we were welcomed into the community of providers who provide services to people with direct involvement, from arrest through reentry, it was also clear that our service model was filling a gap. There are other services Osborne provides downstate that we could offer in Erie County and that would also fill a gap. For example, we have not seen a program like Osborne's Court Advocacy Services that provides forensic social workers to write defender-based pre-plea and pre-sentence mitigation proposals, services that will be of value to those affected by past, present, and future reforms.

Because all of Osborne's work is family focused, I would like to raise the issue of the impact of arrest and the importance of reforms – including eliminating money bail in many cases and ensuring a robust program of alternatives – in the family context. Many families are burdened to the point of being crippled by cash bail for their loved ones, yet when they can't make bail, the defendant's detention – and resulting job loss – may force the entire family into homelessness and poverty. And arrests that involve handcuffs and trips to the police station can be traumatizing to children when a summons would do as well. And unlike Rikers Island – which for all its faults does at least provide contact visiting – most upstate jails require children to visit infrequently and through plexi-glass, also a traumatic way to see one's parent. Osborne has long advocated for both child-sensitive arrest policies – which were adopted by former Albany police chief Brendan Cox years ago, and a requirement that pre-sentence investigations by Probation include a Family Impact or Family Responsibility Statement so that the court and prosecutor will be fully informed of how a sentence of incarceration will affect dependents, whether minor children or elders. The negative impact can also result from even a short period of unnecessary pretrial detention.

In summary, we are recommending the following (in addition to the positions set forth by the ATI/Reentry Coalition), and attaching documents that detail and support our recommendations:

- 1) Demand legislator (and community) participation in decisions on prison closures
- 2) Leave bail and discovery reform laws alone, but study the data, provide resources to pretrial services agencies, jails and probation to insure connection to services, and educate public about reforms
- 3) Continue support of Osborne's Buffalo programming

- 4) Pass the bills related to Visiting (Bring back the buses, Place people near their children, Codify a right to in-person visiting in prisons and jails in NY)
- 5) Support Osborne's Elder Reentry Initiative serving older adults in prison and reentry
- 6) Pass parole reforms (Fair and Timely Parole and Elder Parole bills) and fully staff the parole board with Commissioners who believe in rehabilitation and will adhere to the current parole regulations even when pressured by law enforcement and those who advocate perpetual punishment not to do so.

Thank you.

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Attachments:

- A – FamilyWorks Buffalo FY 20-21 Funding Request
- B – Elder Reentry Initiative FY 20-21 Funding Request
- C – Op Ed in Gotham Gazette by AM Michael Blake and Elizabeth Gaynes
- D – Statement in Support of Funding for Prison Visiting Buses
- E – Press Release for Visiting Is a Lifeline Rally, February 7
- F – Op Ed by Donna Robinson in Buffalo News about Elder Parole bill
- G – Op Ed by Carmen de la Rosa about Elder Parole

**Sustaining FamilyWorks Buffalo
Osborne’s Services to Children of Incarcerated Parents
FY 2021 Funding Request: \$180,000**

The Need

The Osborne Association has, for many years, provided community-based services for NYC children, youth and families with incarcerated parents and family members, and a wide range of services at state prisons, including HIV/HCV education and discharge planning, family support services including parenting education, Family Centers (in visiting rooms), Hospitality Centers (outside visiting rooms), transportation and visiting support, and reentry services – including family-focused discharge planning. We pioneered the use of video conferencing (with private funding) to enable downstate children to remain connected with their mothers at Albion Correctional Facility and their fathers at Clinton Correctional Facility, which was expanded in the Executive Budget in FY 2017, and now serves 8 facilities (soon to expand to include all women’s prisons in NY). Video visiting is an important supplement to in-person visiting in a country where the majority of incarcerated individuals are held more than 100 miles from home. While we know that visiting and family connections support successful reentry, there are benefits to supplementing in-person visiting with video visiting to maintain family connections when cost and distance and visiting hours preclude frequent contact visits.

In FY 20, through a legislative grant of \$180,000 from State Senator Tim Kennedy, we established FamilyWorks Buffalo, an expansion of our community based and video programming. This expansion was vital because the majority of people coming into state prison are no longer from NYC. Although we have video visiting capacity in our sites in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Harlem and Newburgh, many people in the prisons we serve are from upstate and their families do not have access to our video visiting centers or services in New York City.

City and county-specific data from the Council on Children and Families underscore the need for support services located in Buffalo and Western New York for children and families affected by incarceration. This Moving Home Data* maps individuals who were released from a NY State prison in 2016 and importantly, also tracks whether they were parents and how many children they have. In 2016, in the City of Buffalo alone, 532 parents came home to 1,362 children. The number of children with currently incarcerated parents –while unknown- would certainly be greater. Additionally, these data reveal that 49% of all children in Buffalo live in poverty (decreasing the likelihood that they are able to afford frequent visits to distant prisons). There is a great need for outreach and support for families with incarcerated loved ones in Western New York, including a video visiting program offered at no cost to families.

*<http://nysccf.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=fc444129b17d48d49a0d122f3dc98db>

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The Opportunity

Osborne has a limited but vibrant statewide presence, and last year, acted on an opportunity to expand to Buffalo. We now offer family outreach and engagement to serve children of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated parents in Western New York, including community-based video visiting for families at our location at the Community Health Center of Buffalo. Erie County is home to many individuals who are incarcerated and under community supervision. In addition to the Family Ties program at Albion, Osborne now operates Hospitality Centers at several facilities in Western and Central NY, including Wende, Attica, Wyoming, Orleans, Albion, Livingston, Cayuga and Auburn. To serve families from Western New York we seek renewal of funding to support outreach, family engagement, and support services for children, including a video visiting site in Buffalo.

The Osborne Association seeks \$180,000 in state funding to support the continuation of FamilyWorks Buffalo in FY 2021.

About Osborne

As one of the oldest and largest criminal justice services organizations in New York, reaching more than 14,000 individuals a year. Osborne works at every stage of the justice system, from early diversion through reentry, serving justice-involved people and their children and families. Osborne's headquarters are in the Bronx, with additional sites in Brooklyn, Bronx, Harlem, and Newburgh. Osborne offers services at 30 state prisons and 8 city jails/Rikers Island and is well-positioned to design and deliver family services in prisons and in the community. Osborne programs include alternatives to incarceration that include substance use disorder treatment, job training and placement, and mentoring and educational programs for adolescents with incarcerated parents, and those with direct involvement in the justice system. More than a decade ago, Osborne established (and still leads) the New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents, a consortium of more than 60 nonprofit, faith-based, academic and government agencies, supporting policies and practices that meet the needs and respect the rights of this large, yet invisible group of children. Osborne is currently redeveloping the closed Fulton Correctional Facility into a community reentry center. The Osborne Center for Justice Across Generations focuses its policy efforts on children and families affected by incarceration and older adults, the fastest growing population in prison.

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**The Osborne Association Elder Reentry Initiative
 FY 2021 Funding Request: \$185,000**

The Need

Since 2011, the percentage of older adults (50 and above) in New York’s prisons has gone from less than 15% to nearly 21%. These same individuals are also now 80% of those in DOCCS Regional Medical Units. The 10,000+ elders in DOCCS facilities are part of a national trend and an impending crisis in both human and economic terms. More than 2,300 of these men and women are 60 and older, and most have served lengthy sentences and are at extremely low risk of recidivism. They are very costly to incarcerate, with annual costs incurred for older people estimated to be up to five times higher than for younger incarcerated individuals, with medication costs possibly up to 14 times higher. This is not surprising, due to accelerated aging which occurs as a result of pre-incarceration trauma and living conditions combined with the toll incarceration takes on mind and body.

Incarcerated older adults are part of a larger trend: New York has the fourth largest population of older adults in the country. In 2018, Governor Cuomo called for all state agencies to consider the impact of their policies on healthy aging, following efforts that led NY to be named the first Age-Friendly State in the nation. This should include criminal justice agencies as well.

Close to two-thirds of incarcerated elders who appear before the Parole Board are denied release (in large part because the nature of the crime continues to be a deciding factor although it is only one factor- and a static one- to be considered among several) despite close to zero rates of recidivism, and medical parole releases remain very low. Yet, several recent developments point to increasing rates of release for older people. With new parole regulations and 5 new parole commissioners as of June 2019, an evolving shift to emphasize current public safety risk rather than the “nature of the crime,” and efforts to expand geriatric release, more elders should be coming home. Osborne’s Elder Reentry Initiative (one of only two such programs in the country) has resulted in a parole release rate of about 60% for participants. Additionally, if medical parole applications were processed more quickly, decreasing deaths in prison of those who should and could spend their remaining time among family and friends, would also amount to significant cost-savings: just doubling the medical parole releases (from 30 to 60 per year) could save the State over \$5 million.

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Those over 50 who are released from prison are at very high risk of falling through the cracks in our social safety net. Elders face distinct and complex circumstances upon reentry, including: homelessness; unemployment; increased anxiety and difficulty navigating the bustling, digital city; fragmented community and family ties; and chronic or complex medical conditions. They are the fastest growing segment of prisoners, yet their needs are not currently met adequately by either geriatric or criminal justice service providers.

Returning individuals may not know how to access available benefits and often face long delays in obtaining them. People on parole are not eligible for Medicare. Securing appropriate housing, including long-term geriatric-appropriate housing, is of critical importance and extremely challenging. Aging individuals with criminal records are often discriminated against or stigmatized by agencies, social service organizations, and nursing homes and assisted living centers, leaving them with few options and critical unmet needs.

The Program: Osborne’s Elder Reentry Initiative

The Elder Reentry Initiative (ERI) consists of three core components:

Geriatric assessment, parole preparation, and discharge planning: Osborne staff work with older adults in Fishkill (which has a Residential Medical Unit and Unit for the Cognitively Impaired) to assess individual needs, provide parole preparation assistance, develop a tailored release plan, and provide an escort upon release.

Implementing integrated care management: Osborne staff work with returning elders and assist them to connect and remain connected to needed services, including appropriate housing, medical and behavioral health care (including long term/nursing home care), benefits and work opportunities and other needed services, including services available through senior centers.

Improving receptivity and access to needed services, by:

- **Developing partnerships with senior centers and services for older adults** to increase referrals and advocating for the expansion of services, especially safe and appropriate housing options and responses to the opioid epidemic, which is particularly likely to affect older adults whose substance misuse history poses particular risk;
- **Conducting outreach to gerontologists, senior centers, nursing homes, assisted living and palliative care providers, and mental health clinicians** who serve elders to increase sensitivity and reverse the stigmatization of formerly incarcerated elders;
- **Designing and delivering cross-training workshops and webinars for service providers in the fields of aging and corrections/criminal justice.**

The Request for FY 2021

The Osborne Association seeks \$185,000 in state funding to support the work of Elder Reentry Initiative for FY2021, inside of prison including expanding services in the two men’s prisons and adding services to women at Bedford and/or Taconic. These services include geriatric assessments, parole preparation and planning for 75 incarcerated elders (age 50+) returning to NYC, and care management for those released (35-50 individuals in FY 18-19) and outreach to NYC senior service and mental health providers.

New York City currently funds ERI to serve elders on Rikers Island. Private and federal funds support ERI at Fishkill during incarceration and reentry, including peer mentoring. State funding would support the expansion to additional facilities, and to serve individuals being released to the Lower- and Mid-Hudson Valley.

About Osborne

The Osborne Association is a nonprofit organization incorporated in 1931 in memory of its founder, Thomas Mott Osborne (Auburn, NY), who served as warden of Sing Sing over a century ago. As one of the largest reentry organizations in New York, Osborne offers services at 30 state prisons and 8 City jails/Rikers Island, and is well-positioned to lead the way in addressing this timely issue. Osborne is headquartered in the Bronx, with program sites in Brooklyn, Harlem, Newburgh, and (in 2019) Buffalo. In 2018, Osborne released an update of “The High Costs of Low Risk,” a White Paper on the aging prison population originally issued in 2014. In 2015, Osborne launched the Elder Reentry Initiative (ERI), which utilizes a geriatric assessment approved by the NYC Department for the Aging and both city and state corrections departments. ERI participants are eligible for all Osborne programs including workforce development and substance use disorder treatment. When Osborne completes the redevelopment of Fulton Correctional Facility as a community reentry center with transitional housing in 2022, ERI participants will become eligible for services at that site as well.

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GOTHAM GAZETTE

The Place for New York Policy and Politics

The Social Value of Bail Reform

By Michael Blake and Elizabeth Gaynes | January 17, 2020

On January 1, as New York took a considerable step towards a more just and equitable criminal justice system, we heard the all-too-predictable objections to bail reform. Now, along with the chorus that tried to shout down reforms in the last legislative session, we hear some of those who supported these reforms wanting to undo a policy that takes seriously the rights of low-income New Yorkers and communities of color—because of a tragic incident in Monsey that has nothing to do with bail or reform.

As a black state legislator who represents Latino, African, African-American, and white residents in a Bronx district whose citizens have long borne the brunt of inequitable and unjust bail policies, and as a Jewish nonprofit leader whose organization is headquartered in the same district and has worked in jails and prisons for decades, we are appalled that the bitter pain of racism and a resurgence of anti-Semitism are being used to divide us rather than bring us together.

Let's look at the facts. The purpose of money bail is to ensure that defendants—people who are only accused of a crime and thus are legally presumed innocent—will appear in court. It is not meant to be a punishment or a fee. Yet for many people, it represents an insurmountable financial barrier to release that carries dire and life-altering consequences. We have many examples of individuals like Kalief Browder and thousands of others who were arrested and held not because they were a flight risk, but simply because they or their families could not afford bail. Kalief experienced such violence and torture while detained that he took his own life after release. Layleen Polanco never made it home and died while detained on \$500 bail.

We cannot ignore the historic and systemic racism, sexism, and ageism at the root of many criminal justice policies, nor can we pretend that bail does not criminalize poverty and perpetuate injustice, and we must recognize that pretrial detention actually diminishes public safety.

Detention is more likely to cause crime than improve public safety. A report from the Arnold Foundation revealed that people detained for two or three days were almost 40 percent more likely to commit a crime before trial than those detained for less than 24 hours, and those held for more than a month were 74 percent more likely to be arrested for a new crime.

How could this be? After just a few days of detention, people may lose their jobs, miss rent payments, or have their children taken away. After a month, these consequences become even more pronounced and threaten community ties that are crucial to stability and wellbeing. To make matters worse, people who are detained awaiting trial are far more likely to accept plea agreements, even when innocent, because they want to go home — see the exonerated Central Park Five — or be convicted of a crime than similar defendants who are not subjected to conditions that damage their wellbeing.



Assemblymember Blake, one of the authors, at a recent rally

Contrary to the rhetoric of many critics, our reformed bail law does not encourage prosecutors or judges to let “dangerous people walk free.” New York has never permitted preventive detention based on a prediction of future “dangerousness.” Prosecutors and judges have long worked within a system that asked them to consider only whether a person was likely to return to court and provides many options to support people in returning to court that do not depend on financial capacity.

The truth is that most of the benefits of cash bail went to private insurance companies in the bail bond business, and that we are terrible at predicting future behavior. We should not allow the present fear-mongering to create more punitive and harmful bail and detention policies than those we reformed during the last legislative session in Albany.

We stand together for bail reform and all policies that address the underlying inequities and biases in our legal system. It is time to give bail reform a fair chance and not allow this thoughtfully-constructed law to be undone under the pretense of fighting anti-Semitism.

Yes, there is more to do. We must continue to implement programs that increase public safety while addressing inequity. New York City has been working to ensure that people who are released from court or jail are offered needed social services, an approach that should be supported by those who claim to be so concerned about releasing people who were previously being held for ransom they could not pay.

We look forward to a productive and progressive 2020 legislative session that builds on last session’s reforms and continues to shift New York towards a more just and equitable legal system.

Assemblymember Michael Blake represents the 79th District in the Bronx. Elizabeth Gaynes is President and CEO of The Osborne Association. On Twitter @MrMikeBlake & @OsborneNY.

The New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents

A special project of the Osborne Center for Justice Across Generations

STEERING COMMITTEE

Columbia County Reentry
Task Force

Hour Children

Hudson Children of
Incarcerated Parents
Partnership

Office of Children and
Family Services

NYC Mentoring Children
Collaboration

Permanent Judicial
Commission on Justice for
Children

Sills Family Foundation

The Correctional
Association of NY

The Osborne Association

NON-ENDORSING ADVISORS

ACS Children of
Incarcerated Parents
Program

Albany Police Department

NYS Office of Children and
Family Services

Department of Corrections
and Community Supervision

NYC Department for
the Aging- Grandparent
Resource Center

Office of Alcoholism &
Substance Abuse Services

*Membership includes more
than 50 representatives from
government agencies and
community and faith based
partners throughout
New York State.*

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF FUNDING FOR THE FAMILY VISITING BUS PROGRAM (A5942/S731A)

Representing diverse organizations, groups, and faith-based communities providing services and advocacy throughout New York State, we ask that funding for the Family Visiting Bus Program (“Visiting Bus”) be included in the FY 2021 State budget so that the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) can reinstate this critical service. Starting in 1973, DOCCS provided bus transportation to all New York State prisons at no cost to visitors; in 2011, they eliminated this service. As a result, visiting a loved one in prison became impossible or infrequent for many children and families throughout the state, leaving those incarcerated with significantly reduced contact with their support systems. Legislative bills A5942/S731A would reinstate this critical means of transportation by providing buses to all New York State prisons leaving from five major cities: Albany, Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo, and New York City. Funding this invaluable program would be a smart investment that promotes successful reentry, lower recidivism rates, and children’s wellbeing, all positive outcomes that will result in long-term cost savings.

The elimination of the Visiting Bus Program has been devastating to families who relied on this means of transportation, and to incarcerated people who rely on visits to provide them with hope, healing, and the strong relationships that make a successful transition home more likely. New York State should be applauded for its foresight: we recognized the importance of family relationships long before research demonstrated that maintaining family ties is a key public safety, corrections, and reentry strategy; it improves the correctional environment during incarceration and reduces recidivism after release. Visiting also supports the positive outcomes of the more than 80,000 children with incarcerated parents in our state prisons who want and need to visit their parents.

Without the visiting buses, many families throughout the state are unable to get to prisons due to distance: 68% of incarcerated individuals from rural upstate areas are in prisons over 100 miles from their homes, and 58% of incarcerated individuals from the NYC metropolitan region are in prisons over 200 miles from their homes.¹ There were approximately **13,000 fewer visitors during the first year after the Visiting Bus program was eliminated.** The costs associated with travelling to a prison are prohibitive for many families, and most facilities cannot be accessed by public transportation. Many families simply do not have the means to visit regularly, if at all. As one mother who wanted to visit her incarcerated son stated, “Not providing buses is another way to punish poverty.”

¹ DiZerega, M., Asifuddin, F., & Tobias, L. (2012). New York State prison visiting bus: A public safety resource that benefits children and families. New York, New York: Vera Institute of Justice.

We applaud NY State for reducing both crime and incarceration over the past years. According to DOCCS, the closure of 17 prisons since 2011 has resulted in an overall annual savings of approximately \$193 million.² Families—particularly families of color and low income families—are deeply affected when a person goes to prison. Reinstating the bus program invests in families and restores our State’s commitment to children, families, and communities, a commitment New York demonstrated by offering this visiting program for 38 years. **We strongly urge you to include the allocation of \$3 million for the Family Visiting Bus Program in the FY 2021 NYS Budget.**

Thank you for your consideration,

1. Alliance of Families for Justice
2. Arthur Liman Center for Public Interest Law
3. Beacon Prison Rides/Beacon Prison Action
4. Bronx Defenders
5. Brooklyn Defender Services
6. Bronx Clergy Criminal Justice Roundtable
7. Bronx Christian Fellowship
8. CAIC (New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement)
9. Capital Area Against Mass Incarceration, Albany
10. Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services, CASES
11. Center for Community Alternatives, NYC, Rochester, and Syracuse
12. Center for Employment Opportunities
13. Center for Family Representation
14. Challenging Incarceration
15. Children of Promise
16. Children’s Defense Fund, New York
17. Children’s Haven, Bronx
18. Citizen Action of New York
19. Civil Rights Corps
20. Coalition for Women Prisoners
21. Concerned Clergy for Choice
22. Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies, NYS
23. College and Community Fellowship
24. Community Service Society
25. Correctional Association of New York
26. Echoes of Incarceration
27. Exalt Youth
28. Exodus Transitional Community, Inc.
29. Families, Fathers, and Children
30. Fortune Society
31. FPWA
32. Gods Battalion of Prayer, Brooklyn
33. Graham Windham
34. Greater Hudson Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents
35. Greater Hudson Promise Neighborhood
36. Hindu Temple Society of North America
37. Hour Children
38. HousingPlus
39. JCCA
40. Just Leadership USA
41. Justice and Unity for the Southern Tier
42. Justice for Families
43. Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison
44. Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice
45. Legal Action Center
46. The Legal Aid Society
47. Mott Haven Children of Incarcerated Parents Initiative
48. Mental Health Association of NYS
49. Mt. Vernon Heights Congregational Church

² DOCCS Fact Sheet (January 2020). Available at :<http://www.doccs.ny.gov/FactSheets/PDF/currentfactsheet.pdf>

50. New Hope Christian Fellowship, Brooklyn
51. New Hour, Long Island
52. New York Board of Rabbis
53. New York City Jails Action Coalition
54. New York Civil Liberties Union, Capital Region Chapter
55. New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU)
56. New York County Defender Services
57. New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents
58. New York State Council of Churches
59. New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children
60. New York State Prisoner Justice Network, Albany
61. New York Zero to Three Network
62. The NYU Family Defense Clinic
63. Not On My Watch NYC
64. The Osborne Association
65. Partnership for the Public Good
66. Peaceprints of WNY
67. Planned Parenthood of New York City
68. Prisoner Reentry Institute at John Jay College
69. Project Attica
70. Repair the World
71. Sanctuary for Families
72. Sills Family Foundation
73. Speak Ya Truth
74. St. James' Church, NYC
75. STEPS to End Family Violence
76. Unchained, Syracuse
77. Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock, Manhasset
78. Urban Justice Center
79. Visionary V
80. VOCAL NY
81. Volunteers of Legal Services (VOLS)
82. We Got Us Now
83. Western New York Peace Center, Buffalo
84. Women's Community Justice Association
85. Women's Prison Association
86. Women and Justice Project
87. WORTH (Women on the Rise Telling HerStory)
88. Worth Rises
89. Youth Represent

cc: Governor Cuomo
Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins
Assembly Speaker Heastie
Members of the New York State Legislature



New York Initiative for
Children of Incarcerated Parents



For Immediate Release

Contact: Tanya Krupat, tkrupat@osborneny.org, 646-964-2160

***Visiting Is a Lifeline Rally Supports
Family Connection and Visiting***
**Young People, Families, Advocates, and Legislators Call for an End to
Practices that Harm Children and Families Separated by Incarceration**

New York, NY - February 7, 2020 – Today, state lawmakers and a broad coalition of advocates, children of incarcerated parents, and community leaders from the New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents and the Osborne Association, gathered in front of the Bronx Supreme Court to call for immediate action to pass a set of visiting bills that would strengthen in-person visiting in New York State jails and prisons, and increase children and family members' access to their incarcerated loved ones. Senator Sepulveda and Assemblymember Weprin, Corrections Chairs in the Senate and Assembly, respectively, along with Assemblymember Carmen De La Rosa, sponsor of the Family Visiting Bus bill, urged the State to support children and families affected by a parent's incarceration.

There are approximately 105,000 children in New York State with a parent in prison or jail. Most of these children deeply miss and want to visit their mothers or fathers, yet distance is a barrier, and many of New York's 52 prisons are not accessible by public transportation. There are three bills before the New York Legislature that would improve children and family members' access to their incarcerated loved ones: the Proximity, Family Visiting Bus, and Codification of Visits bills will keep parents closer to their children, provide a means of transportation for family members throughout the state, strengthen family connections, and promote the correctional and public safety goals of rehabilitation and successful reentry.

The coalition called for the Senate and Assembly to pass the Proximity Bill S724A/A6710 which would require DOCCS to place parents in prisons closer to their children, and the Family Visiting Bus Bill S731A/A5942 which would restore the Visiting Buses that transported thousands of families to visit their loved ones in New York State prisons every year for close to 40 years (from 1973 to 2011). The group also called on the Assembly and Senate to pass the Codification of Visits Bill S2698/A2483 which would enshrine into state law the right to in-person visits at state prisons and local jails, ensuring that video conferencing never replaces in-person visits as is happening in jails across the country. The coalition framed the passage of these bills as important racial justice and anti-poverty measures because families affected by incarceration are disproportionately families of color and low-income families who spend a significant proportion of their income to stay connected to and support incarcerated loved ones. They also proposed that contracts for the restored visiting buses should go to community-based small businesses, prioritizing businesses owned by people of color and women thereby reinvesting in the communities most affected by incarceration.

“The challenges of incarceration affect entire families. I’m proud to stand here today with colleagues, activists, children of incarcerated parents, and families to support the right to in person visiting, the family visiting bus program, and close to home bills. These recognize the unique and essential role that stronger family and community ties have in supporting both successful rehabilitation and re-entry. It is vital we pass these bills to achieve truer justice, progress, and healing across our state” said **Senator Sepulveda, Senate Crime Victims, Crime, and Correction Committee Chair.**

“I am proud to stand here today, on the steps of Brooklyn Borough Hall, with advocates and family members to make sure the voices of children and families are being heard, especially during this holiday season when family is the most important and the absence of our loved ones who are incarcerated is immensely felt. We must recognize the trauma, sadness and despair that the children with incarcerated parents face every single day. Family visits are necessary in order for families to remain connected and to give these children a bit of hope as they deal with the incarceration of a parent. We know that visits promote an easier reentry process for those incarcerated, helping to maintain a source of support they can rely on as they reintegrate into the communities they have left behind. Visits also provide incarcerated individuals with emotional support, access to their loved ones, and relief from isolation” said **NYS Assemblywoman Carmen De La Rosa.** “That is why I look forward to working alongside my colleague New York State Senator Montgomery and The New York State Legislature to ensure that we proactively make visiting easier for families in New York. This session we must pass The Visiting Bus Bill (S731A/A5942). This legislation will work to restore the visiting bus program that DOCCS provided here in New York for 40 years ensuring that families stay connected through visits.”

“In the next year, New York will have a chance to codify the right to in-person visits into law, expand visiting to seven days at correctional facilities across the state, restore transportation to prisons for the families of incarcerated individuals, and keep parents closer to their children” said **Assemblyman David I. Weprin, Assembly Correction Committee Chair.** “With study after study showing that visiting has a major effect on reducing recidivism rates, improving safety in prisons, and most significantly, preserving family bonds; we must do all we can to keep families and communities together in the next legislative session and I am glad to join the Osborne Association to call for the passage of this package of bills in 2020.”

“Ensuring that a parent who is incarcerated can be placed in a facility closest to their child when possible is not only critical to successful re-entry, but also to mitigate the strain of family separation that can severely impact a child throughout their parent's sentence. This proximity bill (A6710) is a step towards improving the ways in which DOCCS can provide a more rehabilitative environment and reducing recidivism across the state.” – **Assemblywoman Nily Rozic.**

“Osborne is proud to stand with our legislative leaders to call for the passage of this critical legislation. When passed, these bills will increase children’s access to their parents during incarceration. Distance is a huge barrier to visiting – bringing parents closer and restoring the visiting buses that ran for decades would mean that many children could spend the holidays with their parents who won’t be able to do so this holiday season. We call on the NYS Senate

and Assembly to pass these bills and support children and their critical relationships.” – **Liz Gaynes, CEO & President, The Osborne Association**

“We are the Youth Action Council, youth advocates who have or had an incarcerated parent. Thousands of children and families travel far and wide to visit an incarcerated parent or family member and endure terrible conditions. For example, we travel through cold weather, drive long hours, and sit in crowded visiting rooms, and our families spend lots of money on rental cars or uncomfortable and expensive bus services. A way to take away the strain of travelling long distances is by passing a bill that would place our parents in prisons close to us, close to home. We also want New York to bring back the family visiting buses which would reduce the financial strain of visiting. We call on the New York State Legislature to pass these bills now to make visiting our incarcerated parents easier. See Us, Support Us!” –**The Osborne Association's Youth Action Council**

“Exodus Transitional Community is pleased to support this package of bills that will enhance visiting options for children and families whose loved ones are incarcerated, in many cases very far away. The financial and emotional ordeal of visiting is vast and the lack of public transportation to many upstate prisons creates an extra challenge for children and families. Research points out that familial ties and connection reduces violence and lowers recidivism. We commend AMs Weprin, De La Rosa & Rozic along with Senators Montgomery and Sepulveda for sponsoring these bills that have the potential to create long lasting change and increase public safety. “- **Julio Medina, CEO, Exodus Transitional Community, Inc.**

“When a parent goes to jail, we shouldn’t punish the entire family. It is not the fault of their children. But the practice of preventing or limiting children’s ability to visit, be comforted by, bond with and to love their parent punishes them as if they were guilty. Incarceration does not terminate the relationship or sever the bond between a parent and a child. The criminal system disproportionately affects the most socioeconomically disadvantaged and racially marginalized communities, where resources are thin and travel is costly. We must make visitation with parents who are incarcerated easily accessible and convenient for children and families so that they can continue to visit as much as possible. Maintaining these bonds is essential to parent and child reunification post incarceration.” – **The Bronx Defenders**

“I am a child of incarcerated parents. While it may sound like a small thing, I remember very distinctly the impact that the lack of transportation had on my opportunities to see my mother in prison. It is critical for children to maintain bonds with their parents — and beyond their rights to phone calls and letters. Cutting off any right to see, touch, and hold a parent is literally cutting off a lifeline. Bringing back the family visiting buses would recreate that lifeline. It would eliminate an unnecessary barrier that so many children and families have endured during the last several years. It would help alleviate the pain that children already suffer as a result of a lost parent. It would ensure we, the children, do not become just another collateral consequence. We deserve a lifeline!” – **Isabel Coronado, Policy Entrepreneur, Next100**

“There is nothing that can replace receiving a hug or kiss from a parent for a child. When a parent is incarcerated that should be no different. The NYS Bills that support In-Person Visits, Free Bus Transportation and Bringing Incarcerated Parents to Facilities in Closer Proximity to Their Children addresses some of the emotional needs of a child when dealing with the

experience of parental incarceration. Passing these bills would declare the importance of keeping families connected when a parent is incarcerated.” – **Ebony Underwood, CEO, We Got Us Now**

There is nothing more important for children than physical contact and interaction with their parents. Children may not understand incarceration, but they still need hugs, kisses and positive reinforcement from their parents. Visiting incarcerated loved ones should be easy and encouraged in order to keep families together. We need our loved ones to be close to home and free transportation to reach our family members who are often incarcerated far away. I support the Family Visiting Bus and Proximity Bills, and the right to in-person visits. Passing these bills would be a pathway to redemption for our society which has punished family members of the incarcerated for too long.– **Anna Pastorella**, Osborne Speakers Bureau member and mother

"I was incarcerated when the Visiting Bus Program was discontinued. I saw how this impacted fathers with young children. The Visiting Bus Program was literally a lifeline to their children. This lifeline was taken away without any thoughts on the immeasurable harm children with incarcerated parents would suffer from not having in-person visits with their parents. Lawmakers representing our communities must be united in passing the Visiting Bus Bill and codifying the right to in-person visits, as well as passing all other legislation that helps maintain healthy family ties for incarcerated parents and their children." – **Jose Hamza Saldana, Director, RAPP Campaign, and formerly incarcerated father.**

"A visit and a loved ones' touch is essential for anyone incarcerated in a jail or prison. These important pieces of legislation not only support maintaining family relationships, they also validate the hardships families and loved ones experience everyday with incarceration. We must continue to prioritize support systems, because they are vital for ensuring incarcerated people return safely to our communities." – **Lisa Schreibersdorf, Executive Director, Brooklyn Defender Services**

"The Coalition for Women Prisoners, a statewide alliance dedicated to making NY State's criminal justice system more responsive to the needs and rights of women and their families, understands first hand how important visits are for incarcerated mothers and their children. Mothers would be better able to maintain connections with their children during a period of incarceration if parents were placed in prisons close to their children and the Family Visiting Buses were restored. We believe that children have a right to visit an incarcerated parent, and incarcerated parents have a right to parent. NYS MUST PASS the Family Visiting Bus, Proximity, and Visiting Codification bills." - **The Coalition for Women Prisoners**

"The Legal Aid Society strongly supports this critical legislation that seeks to keep families together. New York State incarcerates more than 20,000 people from NYC hundreds of miles away from their communities and their loved ones. While the true solution to this problem lies in decarcerating jails and prisons, we must reinstate the free bus program from NYC and lift the ban on daily visits in medium security prisons to help ensure that families, regardless of wealth and access, stay connected during incarceration. This is the right thing to do, and study after study demonstrates that maintaining family ties helps incarcerated people reintegrate home after release, helps children of an incarcerated parent grow up to thrive, and fosters ties to the community." – **Tina Luongo and Dawne Mitchell, Legal Aid Society**

“As an organization whose sole mission is dedicated to supporting justice impacted women and mothers, we have worked with over 500 women who return to Long Island after incarceration and often become the primary caretaker for their children. When a parent is incarcerated their children suffer exponentially as a result. For children whose parent is behind bars, safeguarding the right to be able to see their mother means they will suffer less trauma and distress and experience a quicker, safer path to family reunification. We urge the NYS Legislature to pass these three important visiting bills which take into account the needs of children with an incarcerated parent.” – **Serena Liguori, Executive Director, New Hour for Women & Children Long Island**

The three bills are currently moving through the legislative process in the New York State Assembly and Senate:

1. The **Proximity Bill (S724A/A6710)** sponsored by Senator Montgomery and Assemblymember Rozic would require the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision to place incarcerated parents in the prisons closest to their children that meet security, health, and programming needs. The bill has been referred to the Floor in the Senate and the Assembly.

2. The **Codification of In-Person Visiting Bill (A2483/S2698)** sponsored by Assemblymember Weprin and Senator Sepulveda enshrines in state law that incarcerated people and their children and families have the right to in-person visits, ensuring that video calls cannot replace in-person visits. The Senate passed this bill last year but it was returned to the Senate after the Assembly failed to do the same. It is currently in the Senate Crime Victims, Crime and Correction committee and has been referred to the Floor in the Assembly.

3. The **Family Visiting Bus Bill (A5942/S731A)** sponsored by Assemblymember De La Rosa and Senator Montgomery restores the visiting buses that DOCCS provided for nearly 40 years at no cost to visitors to each of NY State’s prisons. This bill would provide transportation leaving from the cities of New York, Rochester, Syracuse, Buffalo and Albany to all NY’s prisons. The bill passed the Assembly Correction Committee and is now in the Ways and Means Committee. The bill is in the Crime Victims, Crime, and Correction Committee in the Senate.

One in 28 children in the U.S. has an incarcerated parent on any given day—more than 105,000 children in New York State have a parent in jail or prison. The racial disparities inherent in the current criminal justice system extend to children: 1 in 9 African-American children, 1 in 28 Latino children, and 1 in 57 White children have a parent who is incarcerated. Maintaining family ties during incarceration decreases recidivism, and supports family reunification and children’s well-being.

The Osborne Association’s New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents (NYCIP) convenes more than 60 agencies and community and faith-based partners throughout the state to advance policies and practices that support children of incarcerated parents and their families. NYCIP raises awareness about this often overlooked population of children and elevates their strong, wise, and resilient voices.

BUFFALO NEWS

Elder Parole Is Needed to Give Second Chances

By Donna Robinson | February 9, 2020

On Aug. 13, 2019, my life's course changed forever. While visiting my daughter at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, 300 miles from my Buffalo home, I received news of Valerie Gaiter's passing. She was one of my daughter's mentors at Bedford Hills and died of cancer at 61 years old while in prison.

Gaiter was the longest-serving woman in New York State prisons, who served 41 years on a 50-year-to-life sentence. Her case exemplifies why state lawmakers must pass the Elder Parole Act.

Gaiter was convicted of a terrible crime, a robbery gone awry in which two people were tragically killed. Lives were lost, families permanently damaged, and a community was unhinged.

Based on the heinous facts of the crime, I would never have thought that Gaiter would mentor my daughter and generations of incarcerated women for decades after the crime she committed at 19 years old. However, when my daughter went from a stable homeowner, mother and grandmother, and hard-working Buffalonian to a maximum-security prison, I quickly realized Gaiter should be judged by more than her worst act.

My daughter is one of 2,434 people from Erie County currently incarcerated in New York State prisons, and one of hundreds of Buffalonians serving a life sentence. The rug was pulled from underneath her and our family when she was involved in a tragic crime – a rooming house fire where two men died from smoke inhalation. We were all devastated by the lives lost and the loss our family felt from a life sentence.

When my daughter entered prison, Gaiter embraced her, taught her survival skills, and mentored her. She encouraged her to pray and take college courses. What Gaiter did for my daughter, she also did for thousands of others. She prepared women to safely return home to their loved ones even though her sentence prohibited any meaningful chance at release.

Valerie Gaiter died before her 50-year-to-life sentence allowed her a second chance. Today, there are roughly 1,000 New Yorkers who face the same fate. They are sentenced to prison terms that leave no room for redemption or hope.

To begin to safely unravel New York's system of permanent punishment, state lawmakers should pass elder parole, pending legislation in Albany that would allow the State Parole Board to individually assess the cases of people aged 55 and older who've served 15 or more years in prison.

While it is too late for Gaiter and so many others who have died behind bars, it's not too late for lawmakers to support and pass this bill to make our punitive prisons more redemptive.

Donna Robinson is the Western New York community organizer for the Release Aging People in Prison campaign.

GOTHAM GAZETTE

The Place for New York Policy and Politics

Pursuing More Justice: Elder Parole Is Good for Communities Across New York

By Carmen De La Rosa | January 14, 2020

When I was first elected to the New York State Assembly in November 2016, I pledged to promote safety, fairness, and justice for my community and other communities across New York. I knew that we had so much work to do to support everyday New Yorkers and their loved ones, especially those harmed by the criminal justice system—something that has impacted me and so many others in my northern Manhattan district for decades.

While colleagues and I made important changes to New York’s pre-trial legal system in 2019, we still have so much to do for the more than 45,000 people currently incarcerated in state prisons and their families. We should start by promoting a system of hope and redemption for long-serving incarcerated older New Yorkers.

In the last two decades of mass incarceration, our system has become smaller but increasingly more punitive. As the overall prison population in New York State decreased since its peak population of 72,000 people in 1999, the rate of people serving life sentences has ballooned.

New Yorkers are now serving more time on longer prison sentences than ever before. Today, one in five New Yorkers in prison is serving a life sentence—more than 9,000 total people. Of this group, 1,027 people are serving life without parole and virtual life without parole (with a minimum sentence of at least 50 years) sentences.

They are effectively sentenced to die in prison without any individualized assessment, public safety review, or second chance. Many of these people are already in their fifties and sixties. Those who aren’t yet elders are destined to become older people in prison given the long sentences they have.

The large majority of people growing older in prison and serving life and death sentences are people of color. Stanley Bellamy is one of them.

In 1985, the year I was born, Stanley was a 23-year-old young person from Queens who made a terrible choice that caused devastating harm. He and several others robbed two people at gunpoint, killing one, and causing serious injury to the other. Their actions left family members of the victims forever harmed and a community shaken. Stanley was sentenced to 62.5 years to life in prison, effectively sentenced to die behind bars without any chance for redemption.

Stanley is now a 57-year-old father, grandfather, mentor, teacher, and positive force in every prison in which he has ever been confined over the last 34 years. He has founded and facilitated victim awareness, restorative justice, and other programs that allow him and his incarcerated colleagues to develop insight into the harm their crimes caused.

Stanley has earned two college degrees behind bars with honors and has accomplished more under the constraints of maximum-security confinement than most people have in the free world. While there is no doubt that Stanley caused serious harm to people, families, and an entire community, his continued confinement serves no purpose other than punishment and revenge.

I believe we are all better served with Stanley and others like him in our communities where they can continue to be positive embodiments of redemption.

Allowing Stanley and other incarcerated older people who have already spent decades in prison a chance at redemption would benefit the communities I serve and others across New York State. Upon release, Stanley and his peers could positively impact all of us in ways that so many other formerly incarcerated community leaders already do.

They'd mentor young people, prevent gang and gun violence, and steer 23-year-old 'Stanleys' down a different path. Stanley wouldn't be a risk to the community but would instead enhance community safety and deter crime.

My colleagues and I in the New York State Legislature have a great opportunity to give Stanley and others a chance, and benefit our communities, by passing the Elder Parole Act (A.9040) in 2020.

Elder Parole would allow the State Parole Board to give people in prison aged 55 and older who have served 15 or more years an individualized review and assessment. The bill doesn't release a single person from prison. Instead, it provides hope and a chance at redemption for people who are otherwise serving death-by-incarceration sentences.

If the Parole Board decides to release even a handful of people as a result of the bill's passage, it would save lives, reunite families and communities, and save New York taxpayers millions of dollars.

New York is a national outlier when it comes to long and life prison sentences. Our state has the eighth highest rate of life sentences in the country—greater than Texas, Oklahoma, and Georgia. Far more people have died in the last decade in New York state prisons because of long prison sentences than the total number of people who were executed in every state that still uses the death penalty.

Death-by-incarceration is an abomination that can't go on any longer. I refuse to have my five year-old daughter grow up in a state that condemns people who look like her to die in cages, regardless of their change and transformation over years and decades. For New York to be the truly progressive beacon that all of us want it to be, we must take steps towards unraveling this paradigm of permanent punishment. Elder Parole is one concrete way for us to get there this year.

Assembly Member Carmen De La Rosa represents District 72, including Inwood, Washington Heights, and Marble Hill in Manhattan. She is the lead sponsor of the Elder Parole Act (A.9040). On Twitter @CnDelarosa.