



**TESTIMONY BY CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ALTERNATIVES'S MEMBER  
CLIFFORD RYAN**

*NEW YORK STATE SENATE COMMITTEE ON CRIME VICTIMS, CRIME & CORRECTION  
HEARING ON HOW THE ELDER PAROLE AND FAIR & TIMELY PAROLE BILLS WILL  
IMPROVE PAROLE RELEASE LAWS AND PUBLIC SAFETY IN NEW YORK STATE*

Thank you to the New York State Senate Committee on Crime Victims, Crime, and Correction, and Chair Julia Salazar, for the opportunity to share testimony on the Elder Parole (S.15A-Hoylman) and Fair & Timely Parole (S.7514-Salazar) bills.

As a member of CCA and a founder of OGs Against Violence, I submit this testimony in support of both bills and respectfully urge the Legislature to finally call a vote on them.

**Center for Community Alternatives**

The Center for Community Alternatives (CCA) supports and builds power with people and families who have experienced criminalization, incarceration and community disinvestment through a statewide network of direct services, advocacy, and organizing. By supporting the leadership of directly-impacted people to address individual and community needs, we strive to end mass incarceration and build a world where everyone has what they need to thrive.

**Healing Happens Through Redemption, Not Endless Punishment.**

I am a Black father who has had two sons taken from me by gun violence. My oldest son was killed 21 years ago, and my youngest son has been incarcerated on a gun-related conviction for much of his life. My own process of healing from these losses has led to my strong belief in redemption rather than endless punishment.

Our communities need a parole system rooted in these values, and that considers a person based on who they are today and the contributions they can make to our communities now. The [Elder Parole](#) and [Fair and Timely Parole](#) bills must be passed to support rehabilitation, healing, and a path home for those serving long sentences.

Here in Syracuse, where I was born and raised, I am a community advocate focused on violence interruption and prevention. I also provide emotional and grieving support to other families who have lost loved ones to gun violence, so they too can find peace. [Research](#) shows, and I know from personal experience, that most people who are victims of crime or violence want to see more of the kind of work I do, rather than mass incarceration, unequal treatment, and perpetual punishment. That is why I am also an advocate for parole justice.

My oldest son was murdered by a boy I'll call D. D was just 17 years old when he took my eldest son's life. It took me a long time to forgive him for what he did. But D isn't a boy any more - he was sent to prison for 40 years to life. He has now served over 21 years.

I'm in contact with both him and his family. For my healing process, I needed to know that D is remorseful - and he is. D has become an adult inside, and invested in his own rehabilitation in a



prison system designed only to punish. Another 20 years in prison will not bring my son back, and instead it will deprive our communities from D, who I know has something to contribute.

When D's time comes for parole consideration, I want him to be released based on his transformation, not caged for years or decades longer because of harm he caused decades prior. I also want this opportunity for the thousands of older New Yorkers behind bars. Nearly a quarter of people in prison in New York State are over the age of 50. Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole would make it possible for D, and so many others, who have the potential to live very different lives after incarceration to be restored to their communities and reunited with their families.

I also support parole justice from the perspective of a father who has a son doing time in prison. My younger son has been incarcerated for most of his life. While he was out in the community on appeal, he worked with several organizations, including the NAACP, the mayoral campaign and serving refugees. While in prison, he spends much of his time making plans for how he can support the community when he gets home. I hold my youngest son accountable for the harm he has caused, but like D, he too should be able to redeem himself.

New York's parole system, however, makes this virtually impossible. Parole Commissioners often deny a person's release based solely on their conviction, rather than considering the growth, transformation, and achievements of people like D and my youngest son. The current system also denies thousands of New Yorkers an opportunity to ever appear before the parole board.

That is why New York needs to pass Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole. The Elder Parole bill would ensure that people classified by the Department of Corrections as older adults who have already served 15 years can appear before the Parole Board for case-by-case consideration of parole release. The Fair and Timely Parole bill would restore the board to its original purpose, requiring that people are evaluated based on who they are today, and not solely their original conviction from however many years or decades prior.

Individuals coming home from prison are credible messengers that our community needs in leadership. People like D and my youngest son have so much they can offer. Passing Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole will mean that people who have caused harm can return and help our communities grow, thrive and heal. If they have rehabilitated themselves, then they can help transform and heal our communities back home.

We are counting on our lawmakers to help make redemption a reality.