

TESTIMONY by Margaret L Seely, LCSW

**BEFORE THE HEARING OF THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE COMMITTEE ON
CRIME VICTIMS, CRIME & CORRECTION 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 in particular Chair Julia Salazar, for the opportunity to present testimony on the Elder Parole (S.15A-Hoylman) and Fair & Timely Parole (S.7514-Salazar) bills.

As a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, I submit this testimony in support of both bills and respectfully urge the Legislature to finally call a vote on them.

I'd like to address the issue of public safety regarding the potential release of individuals who are serving long sentences following conviction of a violent crime.

First, it must be understood that these bills do not approach the matter of release from prison. Only the opportunity to go before the Parole Board is addressed. Since no release is ever possible from prison without approval and oversight by the Parole Board, there is no chance that those individuals who do pose a safety risk will bypass this case-by-case review.

Second, there is the question of whether a person who has committed a violent crime can change in prison. I can say a definite yes to this because of my understanding of human personality from working 25 years as a therapist, combined with getting to know individuals who against all odds have done the hard work of changing themselves while imprisoned. These are people who have come to grips with the irreparable harm they have caused and commit themselves to make amends in whatever way is possible, and through this difficult process have become individuals with a new mindset and an emotional foundation that is inconsistent with violence and that is essential for living constructively in society. They have a deep motivation and ability to live this out every day, and they do.

The Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Parole bills will allow the criminal justice system to do its job of protecting public safety more effectively. Providing a means for mature and community-minded people in prison to go before the Parole Board, and for the Parole Board to focus its evaluation of risk on who the individual is now, will increase the possibility that there will be more people in the community who are constructive participants.

Thank you for considering my comments.

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