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Governor Cuomo Signs Senator Luis Sepulveda's State Parole Board Reform Legislation

Measure will require board to annually publish inmates' race, age, other pertinent demographics

Senator Luis Sepulveda and parole reform advocates hailed Gov. Cuomo today, Oct. 3, 2018, for signing legislation by the Bronx Senator that will require the state Parole Board to publish specific demographic information on its decisions involving denial or release of inmates.

Sepulveda, Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Crime Victims, Crime and Correction, had stated in a memorandum with the bill that while the board claims that race is not a factor in its decisions, it has never documented that claim or other reasons it considers inmates for release.

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Add-1

“This information, as well as the inmate’s age when the crime was committed, the crime, and other data are all maintained by the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision,” said Senator Sepulveda. “We need to see that the Parole Board tracks this information and how it uses it to lay to rest any claims of disparate treatment.”

The data will be part of the board’s annual report to the governor and state Legislature.

“I am very grateful to Governor Cuomo for stepping up to the plate once again when it comes to parole and other issues involving reform, as he recently did by allowing former inmates who have served their debt to society to vote,” said Sepulveda. “We need to keep pushing for parole reform, as well as seeing that those individuals who are released have adequate help to get back on solid footing to become contributing members of society.”

"We are pleased to see the Governor sign S.8647/A.2471 into law. Currently and formerly incarcerated people, their families, and all New Yorkers should have total access to information regarding who the Parole Board's work disproportionately effects," said Jose Saldana, Community Organizer with the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign.

"From New York Times investigations to advocates' own research, we know that the Parole Board disproportionately denies parole to Black People, older people and people convicted of certain crimes. This law will allow incarcerated people, their families and advocates to more accurately assess the Parole Board's release rates and is a step toward transparency, accountability and racial justice, said Saldana, who thanked Sepulveda for his leadership on the bill. “We look forward to working with him and other legislators to overhaul the Parole Board and ensure that all people in prison have a meaningful opportunity for parole release.”

The bill signed by the Governor was first introduced in the Assembly by Sepulveda, who then sponsored it in the Senate after winning the seat in a special election in April.

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Add-2

This past July, Sepulveda and a number of fellow legislators announced introduction of a criminal justice reform package, including the bill signed by Gov. Cuomo today and another one he recently signed, allowing crime victims to use documents other than police reports as official evidence when filing a claim with the New York State Crime Victims Board.

The package also includes bills:

- Requiring the ethnic and racial makeup of the state parole board to resemble the racial and ethnic makeup of the state's prison population.

- To ensure that no individual is incarcerated before trial solely due to a lack of financial resources.

- Comprehensive speedy trial reform'

Sepulveda, the Senate Democratic Conference and Gustavo Rivera, Ranking Member of the Senate Health Committee, plan to hold a public forum this November in New York City on Parole Board reform, in which they hope to address a number of issues, including the racial disparity of its members and inadequate reporting of specific details in assessing its decisions.

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