



# The JUSTICE for WOMEN COVID-19 TASKFORCE

Respect\*Dignity\*Safety

4 West 43rd Street, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10036  
646.546.8591

April 18, 2020

Dear Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio,

We are pleased that the Governor has announced that incarcerated people in DOCS facilities over the age of 55, having 90 days or less on their sentence, and not guilty of a violent or sexual related crime will be released on a rolling basis. Believing there are a little over 200 people eligible, out of that number, just how many are women? We are also pleased that the Mayor is reducing the population at Rikers and as we support your combined efforts, please recognize there is much more to do!

As women, mothers, academics, religious and non-profit leaders, health care providers and formerly incarcerated advocates; we recognize the imminent danger facing incarcerated women and mothers during the current COVID-19 pandemic. We, as a collective, have formed the Justice for Women COVID-19 Task Force as a statewide response to urge the protection of women behind bars during this unprecedented pandemic. Our mission is to uphold and protect the inherent dignity, value and human rights of incarcerated women in New York State.

While we call for responsive intervention for all incarcerated people, we urge an immediate and gender-specific response be taken to prevent illness and potential death(s) of pregnant women, older people, the medically vulnerable and all women, girls, intersex, gender non-conforming and trans persons in New York State prisons, county and NYC jails. As of December of 2019, there were approximately 1,961 women in New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) custody. These numbers do not reflect the many women detained in county jails. Three quarters of the women behind bars are mothers, many with babies in prison nurseries, as well as 170 women housed in Rose M. Singer in custody at the New York City Department of Correction (DOC). Women and mothers are often the primary caretakers of their families so we urge you to release mothers so they can return home to their children.

We are equally concerned for the welfare of correctional officers, and other prison and jail staff. We call on DOCCS and the NYC Department of Correction (DOC) to take every precaution and preventive measure to protect everyone and immediately halt the spread of the COVID-19 virus. In addition, we urge DOCCS and DOC to provide education and ongoing updates to the prison and jail population and their families. To do so, we call on Governor Cuomo, DOCCS and DOC to:

- Immediately release anyone at high risk for infection, including those who are older, pregnant, those with underlying health conditions, and mothers with babies in the prison nurseries. We recognize the high risk of infection posed by keeping babies and mothers in prison and urge their joint release as a family prioritized.
- Release not only those convicted of non-violent offenses, but older people since research by leading criminologists has shown that older people in prison convicted of violent crimes are the least likely to reoffend and end up back in prison.

**Statement of Purpose:**  
To bring women home and improve the conditions for women at any facility in NYS; and at the RMSC in NYC

**Conveners**

- \* Serena Liguori-ED
- \* Sharon White-Harrigan-ED

**Leaders**

- Ana Zukowsky
- \* Anisah Sabur-Mumin
- Anita Kennedy
- Bridget Shanahan
- \* Brunilda Rivera
- \* Carole Eady-Porcher
- Chaplain Kim Elano
- \* Chermaine Black
- \* Cheryl Wilkins
- Connie Tempel
- Danielle Minelli-Pagnotta
- \* Denise McCreary
- \* Donna Hylton
- \* Greer Ellis
- \* Grace Price
- \* Hope Sanders
- \* Ivelisse Gilestra
- \* Jessica Vargas
- Joan Montbach
- Jordyn Rosenthal
- \* Kandra Clark
- \* Kathy Morse
- \* Laura Tina Tinen
- \* Laura Whitehorn
- \* Lissette Bamenga
- Lorie Goshin
- \* Lorryne Patterson
- \* Marion Rodriguez
- Misael Syldor
- \* Ms. "V"
- Rabbi Hilly Haber
- Rabbi Suzanne Singer
- Rita Zimmer
- \* Rusti Miller-Hill
- Ruth McDaniels
- Sarita Daftary
- \* Sharon Richardson
- Stephanie Bazell
- Tanya Krupat
- \* Veronica Sullivan-Blyther
- Vance Sykes
- \* Yolanda Johnson-Peterkin

\*Women with lived experience

- Immediately release those held on technical parole violations, all incarcerated people who have been granted clemency, and those within a year of their release date. While DOCCS and DOC have stated that they will release some individuals who qualify for release, this has not been done expediently and has resulted in several deaths.
- End solitary confinement for all women and all people. Immediately release all people from all forms of solitary confinement, stop sending people to solitary confinement for any punitive or other reasons, stop using SHU, keeplock, lockdowns or any other forms of solitary as a response to people reporting symptoms and more generally to the virus.
- Release all women to the least restrictive environment possible. Any person who can be moved to community supervision should be. These environments must adhere to Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines. All those returning to the community must have a discharge and treatment plan, including medical and housing resources provided by DOCCS and DOC.
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- Award clemency for women who have applied for consideration.
- Create clear and transparent procedures to protect the women inside medically. All procedures should be clearly outlined and shared in postings in each dorm and unit. The process for handling an incarcerated woman exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms or been exposed to it must be shared widely. Incarcerated women must receive testing, humane medical treatment, and adequate nutrition.
- Provide public dissemination of the 7 precautions being taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the number of current infections, and the demographic breakdown of the population. DOCCS and DOC must be clear that there will be no punishment or SHU time given to any incarcerated person quarantined due to potential contraction of COVID19.
- Provide free telecommunications while family visits are suspended. Make telephone calls, emails, and any other communications free and accessible ensuring women maintain family ties, which are especially important while visitation is not an option.
- Appoint a family liaison in each facility for families to call and receive information about the status of their incarcerated loved one.

Women in prison been long ignored - often referred to as the “invisible population.” We, many of us formerly incarcerated women, hear state and city executives assure the public that no life is expendable. Yet the plight of incarcerated women, our sisters, goes unseen and unheard. Public health experts have repeatedly stated that people in jails and prison must be released, as has successfully been done in other nations and states without any threat to public safety.

To aid in this effort, we as a task force stand ready to provide housing, reentry and transitional service assistance to all released women, in the capacity, we are able to do so. We still urge immediate action to ensure all justice-impacted women, mothers and babies not be left behind during this pandemic to die or suffer needlessly. Again, as we support your efforts, please recognize there is much more to do!

Please contact the **Justice for Women COVID-19 Task Force** conveners, **Serena Liguori**, New Hour for Women & Children –LI Executive Director at: [sliguori@newhourli.org](mailto:sliguori@newhourli.org) and **Sharon White-Harrigan** Women’s Community Justice Association Executive Director at: [sharon@wcja.org](mailto:sharon@wcja.org) and **Rita Zimmer** HousingPlus Executive Director at: [rita@housingplusnyc.org](mailto:rita@housingplusnyc.org).

Respectfully,

1. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2020/04/07/violence-report/>

## The Justice for Women COVID-19 Task Force

CC:

Acting Commissioner Annucci

Commissioner Cynthia Brann

Jeremy Shockett, Deputy Secretary of Public Safety, Office of Governor Andrew Cuomo

Cal M. Whiting, Policy Advisory for Public Safety

John Morely, MD, Deputy Commissioner NYS DOCCS, Chief Medical Officer

Corrections and Community Supervision Superintendent

Ross MacDonald, Chief Medical Officer for Correctional Health Services

Elizabeth Glazer, Director of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice

Superintendent Bartlett

Superintendent Lamanna

Superintendent Mitchell 'Voyd

Superintendent Squiref

### **Organizational Signators in Support:**

A Little Piece Of Light	Center for Community Alternatives	Darfur People's Assn of NY
Abortion Care Network	Center for Constitutional Rights	Decarcerate Tompkins County
Advocacy and Research on Reproductive Wellness of Incarcerated People, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine	Center for Disability Rights Center for Justice, Columbia Columbia University	Disability and Civil Rights Clinic, Brooklyn Law School Drama Club NYC
Alden March Bioethics Institute, Albany Medical College	Children's Haven: A Place of Healing & Hope, Inc.	Drug Policy Alliance Educate Don't Incarcerate
Alliance for Families for Justice	Circle of Brothers	Exodus Transitional Community
Artist Entertainment	Citizen Action of New York	Fines and Fees Justice Center
Baldwin Wallace University	Close Rosie's	Forward Justice
Birth Beyond Bars	Coalition for Women Prisoners Code Cooperative	FWD.us Gifted Community Services Inc
Breaking the Chains of Your Mind	Collective Speakers	Hands of Hope Outreach Ministries, INC.
Bronx Community Board 9	College and Community Fellowship	Harry Joe Brown, Jr. Foundation
Brooklyn Defender Services	College Gateway	HALT Solitary, CAIC Healing Communities Network
Brooklyn Law School Criminal Defense & Advocacy Clinic	Create Forward CUNY Freedom Prep	
Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth	D4Entertainment	

1. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2020/04/07/violence-report/>

Health in Justice Action Lab, Northeastern University School of Law	Parole Preparation Project	The Bronx Defenders
Hour Children	Participatory Defense Durham	The Bronx Learning Lounge
HousingPlus	Peer Network Of New York	The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls
Hunter Bellevue School of Nursing	Prison Education Project, Washington University in St. Louis	The New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents
Immigrant Defense Project	Prison Studies Project	The New York Women's Foundation
Ithaca Prisoner Justice Network	Providence House	The Public Science Project
Jobs For Life	Pure Legatee inc.	The Real Cost of Prisons Project
Justice League	Rebuilding Independence My Style	The Rockland Coalition to End the New Jim Crow
JustLeadershipUSA	Reentry Rocks	The Tadini House
Legal Empowerment and Advocacy Hub	Release Aging People in Prison/RAPP	The Talking Drum Incorporated
LI Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival	Resilience OC	Unchained Scholars
Los Angeles Centers for Alcohol and Drug Abuse	Rich Family Ministries and PDMNOLA	Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Fork
Media Projects Inc.	Rising Ground, Inc.	United Methodist Women National Office
Movement for Family Power	Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights	University of Denver
National Action Network	Rockland Coalition to End the New Jim Crow	University of Kansas
New Beginnings Reentry Services, Inc.	Rockland Prison Justice Project	V-Day/One Billion Rising
New Hour for Women & Children – LI	Sankofa	Visionary V
New York Communities for Change	SCORES, LLC	VOCAL-NY
NYU Law School Prison Reform and Education Project	Second Chance Reentry	We Are Better Together Warren Daniel Hairston Project
Office of Council Member Helen Rosenthal	Silent Cry Inc	White Coats for Black Lives
Osborne Association	Sills Family Foundation	Women & Justice Project
	Sisters of St. Joseph	Women Transcending
	Social Justice Action of St. Boniface	
	Temple Beth El	

Women's Community Justice  
Association

Women's Community Justice  
Project (WCJP)

Women's Prison Association

**Individuals Signators In Support :**

Al Brooks	Beatrice Lozada	Donald Curtis
Alex Qin	Beth Meredith	Connie Tempel
Alexander Brooks	Betty Chin	Craig Schwalbe
Alexandra Bonagura	Beverly John	Cynthia Salzman Mondell
Alexis Moh	Bianca Valle	Dan McKeon
Allison Hollihan	Bonnie Greaves	Dan Pearson
Aloe Blacc	Briana Gangi	Danielle Donaphin
Amanda Acevedo	Bridget Shanahan	Danielle Minelli Pagnotta
Andrea James	Britney Moreira	Dara Baldwin
Andrea Suarez	Bryn Magnus	Darlene DiFrischia
Andy Dukeshire	Caitlin Cahill	Darlene Jackson
Anita Kennedy	Carole Eady-Porcher	Dave George
Ann Brameier	Carolyn Sufrin	Deborah Arthur
Anne Patterson	Cassady Fendlay	Deena Daughtry
Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal	Catherine Jones	Deirdre Sinnott
Assemblymember Alicia Hyndman	Catherine Nelson Brown	Denise Barnes
Austin Oswald	Charlotte Austin	Denise McCresry
Aviva Kleinman	Chermaine Black	Devohn Phillips
Barat Ellman	Cheryl Wilkins	Diana McHugh
Barbara Treen, parole commissioner (ret.)	Chiara Benetollo	Dominique Pierce
Barrie Tinen	Christina Holdredge	Donna Goldsmith
	Christine Jaselskis	Dr. Apryl Alexander
	Cindi Katz	Dr. Breea Willingham
	Diamond Lewis	Dr. Colleen Eren

1. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2020/04/07/violence-report/>

Dr. María Elena Torre	Jenna Rieder	Kelly Grace Price
Dulce Saavedra	Jennifer Ayala	Kelly J Williams
Eileen Maher	Jennifer Mancuso	Kendra Bradner
Elaine Daly	Jeremiah Goulka	Kimberly Bliss
Elizabeth Ross	Jessica Esposito	Kimberly Q Johnson
Elsie Jolade	Jessica Vargas	Kirsten Pickering
Emily Jones	Jhody Polk	Klarisse Torriente
Erin Cloud	Joan Montbach	Laura "Tina" Tinen
Erin George	Joan Sakalas	Laura J. Limuli
Erin McCloskey	Jodie Blum	Laura McTighe
Eugenia Williams	Johanna Crane	Laura Whitehorn
Fabiola Quijano	Jonathan Spear	Lauren Reed
Fran Gilmore	Jordyn Rosenthal	Le Anne Alexander
Frances Buchinsky	Jose Saldana	Liliana Trafficante
Georgean Arsons	Josephine Cardamone	Linda Agripino
Gina Belafonte	Josie Whittlesey	Lisa Cowan
Gina Sissoko	Jovada Senhouse	Lisha Cundari
Greer Ellis	Judith Kubran	Liza Peterson
Greg Hetmeyer	Judy Clark	Lois Ahrens
Heidi Coleman	Juli Kempner	Lori Rodriguez
Heidi De Leon	Kaia Stern	Lorie Goshin, PhD, RN
Helen Rosenthal	Kandra Clark	Lorraine Patterson
Hope S. Sanders	Kate Mogulescu	Lucas Sanchez
Howard Rosenthal	Kathleen Lynch Gaffney	M. Baum Tucci
Ibrahim Zaman	Kathy Boudin	M. Smith
Jane Weckesser	Kathy Morse	Magella Declé
Jasmin Borges	Katie Schaffer	Maggie Ferreira
Jaya Vasandani	Kayla Gerdes	Marc Pessin
Jayette Lansbury	Keila Pulinario	Marilyn Reyes

Mark McPhee	Pamely Neely	Sandra Langston
Marlena Buggs	Pat Dellatto, NP	Sandy Figueroa
Marlene Steele	Patanjali de la Rocha	Sara Bennett
Mary Ellen Kramer	Patricia Boone-Edgerton	Sara Tempel
Mary-Louise Hildebrandt	Longoni	Sarah Lorr
Megha Ramaswamy	Patricia Zimmerman	Sarah Simone
Melissa Taylor	Penelope Lillianna LillieMay-	Sarah Zeller-Berkman
Michael Skolnik	Garcia	Sarita Daftary
Michele and Rob Reiner	Penny Fujiko Willgerodt	Serena Liguori
Michelle Daniel (Jones)	Peter Sills	Sharmaine Smith
Michelle Fine	Phyllis Chillingworth	Sharon Richardson
Michelle Lewin	Piper Anderson	Shawanna Vaughn
Miea Walker, MSW	Priscilla Carmona	Shelby Henderson
Mildred Lara	Rabbi Suzanne Singer	Sister Janet Kinney, CSJ
Mindi Rosenthal	Rachael Mills	Sister Karen Burke, CSJ
Minerva Pascual	Rev. Donna Hylton	Sister Tesa Fitzgerald, CSJ
Dr. Victoria A. Phillips -	Rev. Dr. Patricia A. Sealy	Soffiyah Elijah
Misaël Syldor	Rev. Sharon White-Harrigan	Stacey Borde
Mishka Terplan	Riki Drout	Stacy Amador
Miyhosi Benton	Rita Taddonio	Stacy Bell McQuaide
Nahal Zamani	Rita Zimmer	Stacy Lyn Burnett
Nancy Hruska	Robert Worlds	Stephanie Bazell
Naquasia Pollard	Robin McGinty	Stephanie Gilman
Natasha Narayanan	Robin Templeton	Susan Celia Swan
Nathaniel Dawkins	Romy Reiner	Susan Karbiner
Nicole C. Jones Young	Russelle Miller-Hill	Susan Rosenberg
Nora Maetzener	Ruth McDaniels	Sydney Baker
Olivia Hull	Ruth Otoo	Tamar Kraft-Stolar
Olivia McCheyne	Ruth Rollins	Tanine Dugger

Tanya Friedman

Tanya Krupat

Tanya Pierce

Tia Fletcher

Tia Hassell

Traci Bowman

Veronica Sullivan-Blyther

Victor Pate

Vivian Nixon

Wesley Caines

Willa Beckman

Yara Bonifacio

Zillah Eisenstein



1. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog>







