

SAMPLE LETTER TO PAROLE BOARD COMMISSIONERS *

Date: _____

Parole Commissioner X
New York State Division of Parole
1220 Washington Ave, Building 2
Albany, New York 12226-2050

Dear Parole Commissioner X,

I am writing as a concerned community member and a supporter of the Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP) project. I am very concerned because the number of aging people in New York State's prisons has been skyrocketing, confining thousands of seniors to cruel and degrading conditions while also denying us valuable community members and wasting millions of taxpayer dollars. Although the overall population in New York's prisons has fallen by more than 20% in the past decade, the number of people aged 55 and older has increased by 64%. This dramatic situation represents a human rights and financial crisis. Moreover, this situation represents a crisis for our communities .

I believe that you and others on the Parole Board have the power to alleviate this crisis by simply following the longstanding Executive Law and 2011 amendments to that law. The Parole Board has been routinely denying parole and compassionate release to aging people in prison, regardless of actual risk to public safety or applicants' accomplishments and transformation while in prison . People released after serving long sentences for convictions for the most serious crimes have a recidivism rate of 1.3% – lower than any other category of those released. And yet you and the other members of the Parole Board continue to deny these individuals release I am urging you and other Parole Commissioners to give fair release consideration to incarcerated elders who have already served considerable time, have transformed their lives, and are no longer a threat to public safety. As you are required under the law, I am urging you give meaningful weight to each of the factors listed in the Executive Law in making your parole release decisions, and to place more emphasis than you are currently doing on forward-looking rehabilitative accomplishments and readiness for reentry factors. Continuing to deny parole release for aging people in prison inflicts cruel conditions on those people, wastes taxpayer money, and weakens our communities by denying us valuable contributing members. As a concerned community member myself, I ask you to reform your current practices and release those individuals who do not pose a threat to public safety or have demonstrated their readiness to return home.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

KEY POINTS TO MENTION IN YOUR PERSONALIZED LETTER

- 1. That you are aware that the release process and procedure related to this elderly population is politically motivated; in that about twenty years ago, the release rate took a nosedive without any change in law, but at the insistence of the then Governor Pataki.**
- 2. That you are aware that in 2011, as a result of concern and protest about this policy change, the NYS Legislature enacted a statute requiring the Parole Board to employ an "evidence-based" risk-assessment process to govern their parole process (NY Executive Law, sec. 259-i(4)).**
- 3. That you are aware that as of this date, the NYS Parole Board has NOT translated the statute enacted in 2011 into their rules, regulations and guidelines for parole release decision-making process.**
- 4. That you are aware that the NYS Parole Board has, in fact, only utilized an evidence-base instrument (COMPAS) to determine how much "supervision" to place upon a person once they make parole, not for the process of determining whether they should be paroled.**
- 5. That you are aware of the low recidivism (likelihood to commit another crime upon release) of the elderly population and those who have served long sentences, but the parole board has resisted using this evidence in their process of determining who should be released.**

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***PLEASE SEND A COPY OF YOUR LETTER TO THE RAPP CAMPAIGN**