

Cuomo Minute WCC
Proposed letter to Governor Andrew Cuomo

“Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.” Matthew 5:7

To Governor Cuomo,

This time of sickness and sadness is indeed a time we need to show mercy to one another. In that spirit, we urge you to consider showing mercy to those who are incarcerated, especially those who are particularly at risk of COVID-19. As Governor of the State, there are many steps you have the power to take; we urge you to take this moment to give people hope in a time of despair and grieving.

You could encourage the use of compassionate release for people who are elderly and people who have health issues, thereby saving lives.

You could use the power you have to grant clemency.

We encourage you also to consider clemency for the many incarcerated people who are eligible for parole but are denied parole solely because of the “nature of their crime.” As members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), we believe that the Inner Light, that each of us has, gives people the power to grow and change. It is important for you to acknowledge that change.

If people in prison have been granted parole, and they have a place to go in the community, you could encourage their immediate release rather than exposing them to the virus while in transitional correctional facilities.

New York State has a very high re-incarceration rate for minor parole violations. Currently this exposes the formerly incarcerated to a greater possibility of infection from the virus. You have the ability to bring a halt to this.

It is urgent that you drastically increase testing of those who are incarcerated and staff to save lives and to let us know how much testing is being done. This protects everyone associated with these facilities. We urge you to be more transparent and active in this area.

You could encourage the HALT Solitary Bill to come to a vote as soon as possible. To experience solitary is to experience torture. In this time of COVID-19, people in solitary are also at greater risk of not receiving the medical care they might need if they are infected.

As members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), we know that there are many non-violent ways to address violence that do not escalate into further violence. Programs such as the Alternatives to Violence Project, already offered in many correctional facilities for those inside, could be used for Staff as well. Training Correctional Officers in de-escalation strategies has the potential to improve outcomes for all who live and work in these facilities.