

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 10, 2020

Contact:

Yan Snead, ysnead@katalcenter.org | 518.360.1534

Emily NaPier Singletary, emily@weareunchained.org | 315.243.5135



Advocates Demand People in New York’s Jails and Prisons Be Released, Not Exploited to Manufacture Hand Sanitizer, Amid COVID-19 Concerns

In response to concerns around COVID-19 spreading into jails and prisons across New York State, community groups leading the #LessIsMoreNY Campaign -- A Little Piece of Light, Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice, and Unchained, issued the following joint statement:

“Following the declaration of a state of emergency on Saturday due to the increasing number of confirmed COVID-19 cases, Governor Andrew Cuomo yesterday announced that incarcerated people at Great Meadow Correctional Facility will be manufacturing 100,000 gallons of hand sanitizer a week to combat shortages and price gouging. These incarcerated workers will be paid pennies per hour and will not have access to the hand sanitizer they produce as it is considered prison contraband due to the alcohol content. Rather than exploiting incarcerated workers by forcing them to manufacture a product that will afford them no protection from COVID-19 themselves, Governor Cuomo should take real action to slow the spread of the virus inside jails and prisons by immediately releasing thousands of people who can safely rejoin their communities.

Few places are as susceptible to the COVID-19 pandemic as jails and prisons where thousands of people are caged together in small spaces with limited options for quarantine. Incarcerated people suffer disproportionately from chronic health conditions that make them vulnerable to the virus and are already receiving substandard medical care.

To slow the spread of COVID-19 both in and out of jails and prisons and prevent the needless deaths of incarcerated people, we demand that New York State:

- Immediately release anyone incarcerated in a New York State prison or a local jail for a technical parole violation;
- Impose a moratorium on incarcerating people for new technical violations until the outbreak is contained;
- Immediately release elderly people;
- Immediately release medically fragile people who are particularly susceptible to complications from COVID-19.

These measures can be taken without risk to public safety and would in fact make communities across New York State safer, not just during the COVID-19 pandemic but long-term.

People incarcerated for technical parole violations have committed no new crime; they have only violated one of the myriad conditions of being on parole such as adhering to a curfew or avoiding contact with other people with criminal records. On any given day there are more than 1,700 people held in local jails for these violations, and more than 7,000 people annually are returned to state prison, accounting for more than one-third of all New York State prison admissions.

We know that elderly and medically fragile people are more likely to contract and die from COVID-19. The number of people aged 50 or older in New York State prisons has doubled since 2010; it now exceeds 10,000 people, accounting for about 20 percent of the prison population. Elderly and medically fragile people almost never return to prison once released.

The vast majority of aging people in prison and people incarcerated for technical parole violations are Black and Latinx. The current COVID-19 pandemic highlights the urgency of emptying our jails and prisons. We call on Governor Cuomo and the Legislature to take immediate action to ensure the safety and well-being of people detained in jails and prisons in New York, not by exploiting them but by releasing them.”

About the Less is More NY Campaign:

The Less is More NY Campaign is a coalition of groups working to pass the [*Less is More: Community Supervision Revocation Reform Act \(S.1343B – Benjamin / A.5493A – Mosley\)*](#), developed by people on parole, people currently incarcerated, family members, and groups across New York. Passing this bill would be an important step in the fight to end mass incarceration and mass supervision by restricting the use of incarceration in response to parole violations and promoting early discharge from community supervision. For more information visit: www.lessismoreny.org

###