

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact:

Yan Snead, [ysnead@katalcenter.org](mailto:ysnead@katalcenter.org) | (518) 360.1543



## **#LessIsMoreNY Coalition Applauds the New York State Bar Association for Supporting Robust Parole Reform**

**Comprehensive Legislation Will Overhaul New York's Parole System, Shrink the Jail Population, and Speed Up the Process to Close Rikers Island**

*Albany Must Pass Less Is More in 2020*

New York, NY – The Less Is More Coalition applauds the New York State Bar Association for [supporting robust parole reform](#). Many of the reforms that the Bar Association supports are included in the **Less is More: Community Supervision Revocation Reform Act (S.1343B – Benjamin / A.5493A – Mosley)** The #LessIsMoreNY bill was authored by people on the inside and people impacted by the parole system; community groups including Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice, and Unchained; policy and research groups including Columbia Justice Lab and the Lippman Commission. #LessIsMoreNY will overhaul New York's parole system, shrink the jail population across the state, and help to speed up the process to finally shutter Rikers Island once and for all.

**The Less is More Act** is a comprehensive legislative package that addresses the current problems of how technical violations in the parole system lead to reincarceration. The reforms in the bill include: incentivizing good behavior and allowing New Yorkers to earn accelerated release from parole; requiring fair hearings; creating maximum terms of reincarceration for violations and eliminating incarceration as a sanction for certain technical violations; and saving taxpayer dollars by reducing the number of incarcerated New Yorkers, and reinvesting those funds back into the community.

During a historic vote on October 17<sup>th</sup>, the New York City Council voted “yes” on the Mayor’s plan to Close Rikers and replace the existing jails in Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and Bronx. As the City moves forward with the closure process, the question of people on parole detained at Rikers looms large. While the average daily population in NYC has fallen nearly 25 percent since 2014– and will drop further after bail reform implementation in 2020– the number of people held for crimeless, technical violations of parole is up nearly 20 percent in the last 5 years. The increasing number of people detained for state parole violations is slowing the closure of the City’s jails on Rikers Island and prohibiting the Planning Commission from reducing the estimated size of the Mayor’s proposed borough-based facilities even lower.

To fast-track the closure of the toxic jail complex and reduce jail populations in NYC and around the state, we demand Albany follow the recommendations within the Task Force's initial report and swiftly enact changes to the parole system, beginning with passing our *Less Is More* Act. This legislation would strengthen public safety and supports effective re-entry for people coming home from prison. Through the passage of this bill, the state can ensure that the detention population shrinks in New York State and the future detention footprint becomes much smaller.

**Bill sponsor New York Senator Brian A. Benjamin, said:** “When it comes to community supervision, less is more. Fixing our state’s unjust parole system is the next step that New York needs to take in our mission to end mass incarceration and close Rikers. I am glad that we can now add the New York State Bar Association to the coalition that supports this vital and common sense reform. This coalition includes impacted individuals, law enforcement, judges, and district attorneys from around the state.”

**Tara Cobbins, Katal Albany Leader, said:** “Any endorsement that will overhaul this broken system that is now the biggest driver of mass incarceration and causes the destruction of families, is enough to get me to stand up and applaud. Especially when that endorsement comes from the Bar Association. I've taken too many calls from family members and loved ones throughout the state, who are or have been subjected to the erasure of their hard work and progress due to incarceration for technical violations of their parole, and it is gratifying that I can share this news with them. As a community leader, I am dedicated to getting #LessIsMoreNY passed this coming session and the adoption of this report and recommendations should be heard loud and clear in Albany.”

**Derek Singletary, Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director of Unchained, who has previously been on parole, said:** "The report from the New York State Bar Association's task force confirms what people like me who have been on parole have known for many years: our current parole system is a revolving door back to prison, wasting millions of dollars and, more importantly, disrupting families and communities. The recommendations from the Bar Association align closely with the proposals in the Less is More Act which was introduced in the New York State Legislature earlier this year. The task force includes prosecutors, judges, defenders, and other attorneys from across the state, and support from this diverse group underscores the urgency of passing the Less is More Act."

**Donna Hylton, Senior Justice Advisor at the Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice, who was formerly incarcerated for 27 years, said:** “There is only one jail population that is currently on the rise in New York City – people returning to a life behind bars because of an overly punitive system that punishes people for harmless technical violations of parole supervision. The great majority of people on parole do not pose a public safety risk, but still have their lives disrupted for minor infractions – things that the average person would not even receive a ticket for. This is morally wrong and Albany must act and change the status quo in 2020.”

**Tyler Nims, Executive Director of the Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform, said:** "The State Bar has joined the growing chorus of voices of law enforcement officials, community groups, and people on parole calling out for reform of New York's outdated and counterproductive parole system. If the dysfunctional jails in Rikers Island are to close, New York has to stop incarcerating so many people for non-criminal technical violations of parole. It is high time for our state to end the often senseless incarceration of people on parole for these technical violations and instead boost public safety by focusing on supports and incentives to help people succeed."

**Vincent Schiraldi, co-director of the Columbia Justice Lab and former Commissioner of New York City Probation, said:** "New York State sends the second highest number of people back to prison for non-criminal, technical violations of state parole, costing the state over \$300 million annually and flying in the face of national trends, in even some very conservative states, towards a less punitive and more rehabilitative approach to community supervision. The recommendations from the New York State Bar Association's ideologically and geographically diverse Task Force on the Parole System are a clarion call to fix parole this year and pass the Less Is More Act, which tracks closely with the Task Force's recommendations."

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