

April 19, 2021

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo

Governor of New York

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins

New York Senate President Pro Tempore & Majority Leader

The Honorable Carl Heastie

Speaker of the New York State Assembly

Dear Governor Cuomo, Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Speaker Carl Heastie:

As clergy and leaders from four leading New York City houses of worship, two New York State-wide faith coalitions, and one New York City-wide faith coalition, we urge you to prioritize passage and approval of the Less Is More parole reform bill (S1144/A5576) this legislative session.

Our state incarcerates more people for technical parole violations than any other state in our country. In fact, about 7,500 people on parole end up back in New York prisons each year for minor misconduct. New York’s 40% prison reincarceration rate for people convicted of technical, noncriminal violations is almost three times the national average. Further, Black people are incarcerated for technical violations at 12 times the rate of White people in New York City, and almost five times the rate of White people in New York State.

In its pursuit of a more just legal system, the Less Is More bill is deeply aligned with our faith traditions and commitment to ensuring a criminal justice system guided by compassion for the most vulnerable among us. As the New York State Bar Association has correctly concluded, reincarceration for minor violations leads to “devastating consequences for the person charged while having no appreciable impact on public safety.”

We support the Less Is More bill because it is a necessary step toward human rights and racial justice. Many other faith communities around the State agree, including the following faith coalitions: New York Faith Leaders for Criminal Justice Reform and United Christian Leadership Ministry of Western New York.

Less is More also has significant law enforcement support across the State, including district attorneys, police and county sheriffs, former corrections, parole, and probation commissioners, and the former Chief Judge of the State of New York. Additionally, during this year of severe budget constraints, Less Is More is a common-sense reform, projected to save hundreds of millions of dollars in State and county funds.

We are grateful for your leadership on criminal justice reform, including passage of Raise the Age and bail reform legislation. Following last year’s inspiring protests around our State and nation, making Less Is More law will demonstrate once again that New York State’s elected leaders care about making real and lasting racial justice reform.

In solidarity,

Rabbi Angela Buchdahl

Rabbi Nicole Auerbach

Rabbi Hilly Haber

The Central in Action Organizing Team

**Central Synagogue**

Rabbi Rachel Timoner

Rabbi Stephanie Kolin

**Congregation Beth Elohim**

Rev. Michael Livingston

Rev. Kevin VanHook

**Riverside Church**

The Rev. Phillip A. Jackson

Priest-in-charge

**Trinity Church Wall Street**

Rev. Peter Cook

**New York State Council of Churches**

Lee Winkelman

**Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism-NY (RAC-NY)**

Rachel Kleinbaum

**New York Jewish Coalition for Criminal Justice Reform**