



# New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Believing. Healing. Preventing.

## **NYSCASA Statement in Support of the Less Is More Community Supervision and Revocation Reform Act**

For Immediate Release: Oct. 7, 2021

Contact: NYSCASA Staff, [info@nyscasa.org](mailto:info@nyscasa.org)

### **What Do Victims and Survivors Say?**

We have seen individuals and groups who oppose criminal justice reform speak on behalf of victims and survivors, but who is listening to what victims and survivors say they want?

Survivors' needs and beliefs about criminal justice are as varied and diverse as survivors themselves. However, in *Crime Survivors Speak*, a 2016 report published by the Alliance for Safety and Justice, more than 60% of survivors indicated that they favor shorter prison sentences and more spending on prevention and rehabilitation programs, including education, mental health treatment, and drug treatment.

In 2017, the Downstate Coalition for Crime Victims, an interdisciplinary group of survivors and advocates in New York State, developed a new vision for crime victims based upon their own experiences and the needs and hopes shared with them by the people they served. They learned that many survivors want: safety for themselves and for their communities; racial justice and an end to the racial inequities which contribute to and exacerbate their traumas; interventions to stop cycles of violence, and to ensure that the people who harmed them will not cause harm in the future; accountability from people who perpetrate of harm; and recognition from their communities that what happened to them was wrong.

In its present form, the criminal justice system does not meet these needs. In many ways, the system exacerbates the harm done to victims and survivors, especially but not only those directly impacted by incarceration.

### **Crime Survivors Impacted by Mass Incarceration**

We must also remember that survivors of violence and people who have been impacted by mass incarceration are not two distinct groups. There are many survivors who have loved ones in prison, many survivors who have been criminalized for acts they have committed in the process of surviving violence, and many survivors who are incarcerated now, trying to heal from violence and abuse within the inhumane environment of our prisons.

Most people entering prisons and jails have experienced violence and abuse prior to their incarceration. Surveys show that nearly 60% of people incarcerated in women's prisons, and as many as 94% of some women's prison populations, are survivors of violence, including sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and child abuse.

Violence and abuse are also prevalent behind bars. In 2015, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) reported more than 24,000 instances of sexual violence in prisons, jails, and adult correctional facilities across the United States. More than half of reported instances were perpetrated by staff against incarcerated people. In a survey conducted in 2020 by the Correctional Association of New York at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, 74% of 110 respondents indicated that they had witnessed some form of violence or abuse by staff, including physical, sexual, and verbal abuse, while 53% of respondents reported experiencing these acts of violence by staff themselves.

Moreover, the experience of incarceration is traumatic in and of itself. People who are incarcerated lack bodily autonomy, are subjected to harsh physical and environmental conditions, remain under constant surveillance, and are disconnected from their communities. The experience is worsened for survivors of violence.

These cumulative experiences result in a sizable population that has survived trauma and violence returning to their communities. Formerly incarcerated people often do not have access to the trauma care and healing support that they need. When people come out of confinement, they deserve to be met with dignity and community support, not the constant threat of re-incarceration looming over them.

### **NYSCASA Supports Trauma-Informed Approaches to Criminal Justice Reform**

As an organization committed to preventing sexual violence and strengthening support systems for survivors, the New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault supports trauma-informed approaches to criminal justice reform. We believe that each of us is more than the worst thing we've done. We also believe that we are all capable of meaningful accountability and profound transformation when our humanity is recognized and we have access to hope, resources, and community support.

Endless punishment poses a systemic barrier to healing and accountability. It ignores the diversity of needs of survivors of violence and trauma, compounds the trauma suffered by incarcerated survivors, and takes necessary resources away from community safety.

Instead, we want healing and care for all survivors, opportunities for meaningful accountability for people who have committed violence and harm, and investments in community-led initiatives to prevent and respond to violence. Parole reforms that reduce the likelihood of re-incarceration and promote safety and justice for families and communities will move us closer to these goals.

This is why the New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault joins the growing coalition of survivors and advocates who support the Less Is More Community Supervision and Revocation Reform Act. We thank Governor Kathy Hochul for signing #LessIsMoreNY into law.