



PAROLE  
PREPARATION  
PROJECT

**Transforming** the parole release  
process in New York State

# PAROLE IN NEW YORK STATE

## Every year,

the New York State Parole Board interviews more than 12,000 people in prison to determine whether they are suitable for release. Most interviews are conducted by videoconference, and each parole applicant has approximately 15 minutes to make their case for freedom.

**The Board denies nearly 60% of people who appear before it, despite the fact that most applicants have exemplary records, solid release plans and a very low risk of recidivism. Often looking only to the nature of a person's crime, the Board shows little interest in personal transformation, growth or insight.**

For the 9,000 people—about 20% of the prison population—serving parole-eligible sentences with a maximum of life, the Parole Board is their only way out. Because of the Board's punitive practices, many lifers have been denied parole repeatedly, languishing in prison for decades longer than their minimum sentence, growing old behind bars, and even dying before ever returning home.



# OUR MISSION

A woman with glasses and a black top is speaking into a microphone. Behind her is a large white banner with the text 'PAROLE PREPARATION PROJECT' and 'A PROJECT OF THE NATIONAL... NEW YORK CITY'. The banner also features a logo consisting of concentric circles.

PAROLE  
PREPARATION  
PROJECT  
A PROJECT OF THE NATIONAL...  
NEW YORK CITY

## THE PAROLE PREPARATION PROJECT (PPP)

is a non-profit organization that provides critical advocacy and direct support to currently and formerly incarcerated people serving life sentences, and works to transform the parole release process in New York State.

# Profile



## Theresa Holland

Theresa was arrested at 21 years old and sentenced to 25 years to life in prison in 1986. While incarcerated, Theresa became heavily involved in her church community. She was a teacher and choreographer in prayer dance, a contemporary form that combines movement and prayer as a form of worship, and served as a mentor and maternal figure for many other religious women inside. While in prison, Theresa also earned her GED, an accomplishment she never thought

possible because of her lifelong struggle with a learning disability. Theresa was finally granted release at her fifth parole interview. She served more than 32 years in prison. Theresa returned home to the loving and supportive community of Hour Children, a residential program in Queens, NY for formerly incarcerated women. She is currently enrolled in their Working Women Reentry Program, and volunteers regularly for the Parole Preparation Project.



# OUR PROGRAMS

## VOLUNTEER CORP

We train volunteers to work with parole-eligible applicants to develop comprehensive release plans, create compelling advocacy materials, and practice interviewing skills.



## ADVOCACY

We collaborate with advocates across the state to push for a more transparent, just and merciful parole release process.



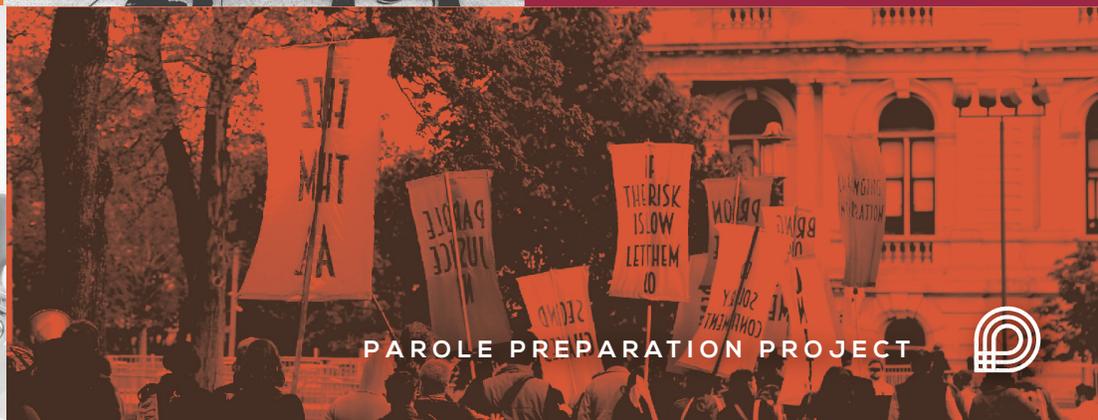
## LEADERSHIP

We grow and support the leadership of currently and formerly incarcerated people in the broader movement for parole justice.



## COMMUNITY BUILDING

We provide access to services and supportive communities for people returning home from prison and their families.





# OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Today, **nearly 60%**  
of Project applicants **are granted release**

**\*** COMPARED WITH THE  
STATEWIDE AVERAGE OF 35 - 40%

Since 2013, we've trained

**over 500**  
volunteers

**+**

worked with

**more than**  
**250 people** in prison.

Since our founding, **we've consulted with**  
**more than 15 states**

on local parole campaigns and  
worked with other organizations to  
build projects similar to our own.

We've co-organized

**dozens of**  
**advocacy days**

in the state's capitol and mobilized hundreds  
of attendees from across the state.



In 2018

**we built a pro bono project to train attorneys across the state**

to represent people in appeals of their parole denials. In 2019 we played a key role in several legal victories.

**Over 95%**  
of returning Project applicants  
**remain in the community**  
and are **thriving.**

Many play a leadership role in training our volunteers and in our statewide advocacy efforts.

In 2017 and 2019

**we successfully pushed for new parole regulations**

and ensured

**the appointment of new parole board commissioners.**

We also blocked the re-appointment of several notoriously punitive commissioners.

**We've published multiple articles and reports**

including a 2017 CUNY Law Review article, *Collaborating Across the Walls: A Community Approach to Parole Justice*.

Our 2018 report "New York State Parole Board: Failures in Staffing and Performance" received widespread media attention and served as a catalyst for major reforms to the Parole Board.





# Charles “Chas” Ransom

Chas Ransom returned home to New York City on July 31, 2017. On October 22, 2017, less than three months after his release, he died suddenly of a heart attack. He was 53 years old. Chas spent 33 years in prison and was denied parole five times. Weeks after his homecoming, Chas was hired by Appellate Advocates, a prominent public defense organization in New

York City. He also accomplished a great deal while incarcerated. He was a facilitator, teacher, mentor, adviser, liaison and so much more. In the final years before he was released, he was a trusted leader at Otisville Correctional Facility. As President of the Lifers and Longtermers Organization there, he coordinated their annual Parole Summit, where advocates and

incarcerated people come together to discuss parole policy and its devastating impact on people serving life sentences in New York State prisons. There is no other program like it in the state, or perhaps even the country. It was at the Parole Summit in 2013 that the Parole Preparation Project was born. We simply would not exist without Chas, and our work continues in his memory.



# Profile

# LONG-TERM GOALS

## TRANSFORM

the parole release process in New York State and end life and long sentences.

## REUNITE

currently incarcerated people with their families, loved ones, and communities

## REPLICATE

our model across the country and strengthen the national movement for parole justice.

## DECARCERATE

New York State by securing the release of thousands of people from prison.

## GROW

the statewide movement for parole justice by mobilizing community volunteers and directly impacted people.

## AMPLIFY

the voices of formerly incarcerated leaders and implement their visions.





## Richard Rivera

Richard was convicted of killing an off-duty police officer during a botched robbery at age 16. He was sentenced to 30 years to life and first came up for parole in 2010. Richard was denied parole five times. It was not until his sixth appearance, after an extensive appeals process, that he was granted release. During his 37 years in prison, through therapeutic services, peer support and intensive introspection and self-study, Richard worked to come to terms with and atone for his

crime. He obtained a Master's Degree in Professional Studies from New York Theological Seminary and a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from Syracuse University. He completed 87 credits in Literature from Bard College while working diligently towards a second Bachelor of Arts degree. Richard also contributed to multiple programs while inside. He helped create a new program focused on the physical and mental health needs of older individuals in

custody called the Fifty PLUS Organization. He participated in the Prisoners AIDS Counseling and Education Program ("PACE"), to educate the prison population on the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and he was closely involved in implementing the Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prisons, a program with a mission to provide education, life skills and re-entry support for formerly incarcerated people. He joyfully returns home to Spencer, NY to his wife and partner of 10 years, Kerseinya Rivera.



# OUR ORGANIZATION & STAFF

## PAROLE PREPARATION PROJECT

operates with a lean staff and low overhead. Our efforts are making a profound and measurable impact on parole and prison justice in New York State because of the generosity and collaboration of our volunteer corp, pro-bono lawyers, in-kind donors, funders and partner organizations.



**founder & executive director**

## MICHELLE LEWIN

Michelle is an attorney in New York State and a graduate of CUNY School of Law. Born and raised in Atlanta, Michelle has been active in anti-incarceration work since 2005. Prior to law school, she worked for the Fortune Society in their Alternatives to Incarceration program, and as a first-year law student co-founded the Parole Preparation Project. She has trained countless volunteers and worked alongside hundreds of people serving life sentences in New York State prisons in their struggle for parole release. She is the co-author of *Collaborating Across the Walls: A Community Approach to Parole Justice*, published in 2017 in the CUNY Law Review.



**director of community engagement**

## ANTHONY DIXON

Anthony is a former applicant of the Parole Preparation Project and returned home in 2016 after 32 years of incarceration. While in prison, Anthony received commendations for developing an anti-violence curriculum and a therapeutic substance abuse counseling program. In his current role, he offers individual counseling, weekly support groups, and leadership training for former applicants of the Project. For his extraordinary efforts, Anthony was awarded the prestigious Freedom Fighter Award in 2018 by Citizens Against Recidivism.



# CONTACT US

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New York City Chapter

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