

BROOKLYN

The First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn
A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION

Policy on Fair and Fully Staffed New York City Parole Board

WHEREAS, we are guided as a society by the mission of our congregation which is:

The First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn is a joyful, caring, religious community that inspires and empowers people to Grow spiritually, Care for one another, and *Work for justice* and stewardship of the earth.

WHEREAS, we promote and affirm our principles as our “lived tradition” and they include:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

WHEREAS, we draw from sources of wisdom and spirituality which include:

Words and deeds of prophetic people which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;

WHEREAS, there are more than 10,000 people in NYS prisons—20% of the prison population—are aged 50 or older. The vast majority are Black and Latinx people. Older people, especially those who have been convicted of the most serious crimes, have the lowest recidivism rates of any age cohort, posing little, if any risk to public safety.

WHEREAS, The New York State Board of Parole interviews more than 11,000 people every year—roughly 60 hearings per day— via video conferences that last an average of 15 minutes. The Board denies release to the majority of all parole-eligible people. Many have served additional decades in prison due to the punitive, retributive and racist culture of the Board. For those serving long sentences, the Board repeatedly denies parole based on one, unchangeable factor—the nature of a person’s crime—and not a person’s age, many accomplishments in prison, personal transformation or network of support.

WHEREAS, Parole is highly political. Commissioners are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. Candidates contribute to the campaigns of elected officials to secure their appointments, and once appointed, bend to the political pressure of special interest groups. The New York State Board of Parole permits 19 Commissioners, but currently there are currently only 12 active Commissioners.

WHEREAS, people who are incarcerated may face [accelerated aging](#) (“weathering”) and are routinely denied adequate health care in prisons. The average life expectancy in prison is 58 years old. Many reentry and “Coming Home” programs exist to connect people released on parole with the life-saving social and medical resources.

WHEREAS, there are current 2 NYS bills in the state senate and assembly addressing the systemic racism of keeping aging people in prison:

- [Elder Parole](#): Allows for the consideration of parole release for people aged 55 and older who have served at least 15 consecutive years in prison.
- [Fair & Timely Parole](#): Ensures that the parole release process is based on who people are today and their many accomplishments in prison, not their crime of conviction.

WHEREAS, Releasing Aging Population from Prison (RAPP) and other criminal justice reforms are supporting advocacy initiatives for A [Fair & Fully Staffed Parole Board](#). The Parole Board should be fully staffed by 19 Commissioners who are social workers, psychologists, nurses, and other professionals that embrace notions of mercy, redemption and rehabilitation.

WHEREAS, over 20 First U Brooklyn congregants of varying ages, interests, and affinities attended the RAPP forum on 1/31 and not only demonstrated support for the advocacy efforts, but also showed great interest in taking action to support RAPP and similar organizations.

NOW, THEREFORE, Weaving Social Justice (WSJ) is requesting approval from the board for a congregational vote at the Feb Congregational Meeting to go on-record as supporting the two proposed pieces of New York State legislation and the advocacy for a Fair & Fully Staffed Parole Board.

Adopted by the board of trustees February 11, 2021