

## New York State Parole System

Thousands of people in New York are serving a sentence where parole is their only chance for a life outside of prison. The parole board is tasked with evaluating a person's readiness to be released back into society.

However, in most cases, parole is denied decades later because of the underlying crime, even when the person has proven they are rehabilitated. Two proposed bills would help give those in front of the parole board a fairer look:

### Fair and Timely Parole (S.159/A.127)

This bill would shift the focus of the parole determination from relying solely on the nature of the offense to who the person is today.

This bill would require the Board of Parole to have a clearly articulated and current public safety reason for denying the incarcerated person parole.

### Elder Parole (S.454/A.514)

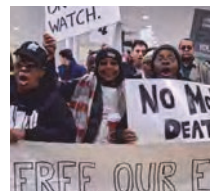
Provides incarcerated people aged fifty-five (55) and older who have served fifteen (15) or more years of their sentence an opportunity for parole release consideration.

This Bill does not guarantee release, but merely provides an opportunity for the state's oldest and sickest incarcerated people an opportunity to show the parole board why they are ready to be released.



## Organizations Making a Difference

- Release Aging People in Prison
  - [www.rappcampaign.com](http://www.rappcampaign.com)
- People's Campaign for Parole Justice
  - [www.parolejusticenyc.com](http://www.parolejusticenyc.com)
- Prison Policy Initiative
  - [www.prisonpolicy.org](http://www.prisonpolicy.org)



### For More Information:

Email: [law-cjac@buffalo.edu](mailto:law-cjac@buffalo.edu)

Website: <https://www.law.buffalo.edu/beyond/clinics/criminal-justice.html>

# "I AM" Campaign

Featuring Chelsea Kuss & Missy Robinson



Presented By  
The University at Buffalo School of Law  
Criminal Justice  
Advocacy Clinic



## “I AM Campaign”

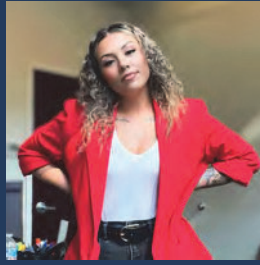
The “I AM” Campaign shares the stories of formerly incarcerated people doing great works in the community and currently incarcerated people who strive to bring their good works from correctional facilities to the greater community.

Through interviews with currently and formerly incarcerated individuals, we aim to amplify the voices of people making significant contributions to their communities inside and outside of prison.

Often, we’ve found that two people harbor the same determination to help others, but one is incarcerated and one has been released.

The stories of both incarcerated people and formally incarcerated people are examples of the dire need for a different approach to parole in New York State. Their stories help show why incarcerated and formally incarcerated people are infinitely more than the worst decisions of their life.

Stay tuned for more narratives highlighting other pairs of incredible incarcerated and formally incarcerated people.



## I AM Chelsea Kuss

I was 17 years old when I was convicted of aggravated vehicular homicide. I served my sentence of six years, but soon found myself struggling to cope with the trauma of incarceration. I turned to alcohol as a coping mechanism, yet this led to another terrible decision. In 2019, I was convicted again for driving while intoxicated and served a two year sentence.

While incarcerated, I joined multiple programs including the Transitional Services Program, where I helped individuals prepare for their release and re-entry into the community. Through this experience, I also noticed many issues plaguing these programs, such as group facilitators failing to understand the experiences of incarcerated people. In addition, I saw the struggles that incarcerated mothers face in trying to see and connect with their children.

My experiences in prison drove me to become an advocate for the formerly incarcerated. I am now a Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor and work for Centers for Community Alternatives to help people re-integrate into society. I often encourage my clients to put the work in themselves just as I did, yet I will always do the best work possible for my clients.

Despite how others made me feel, I know that I am not defined by my worst moment. My hope is that passage of the Fair and Timely Parole Bill and the Elder Parole Bill will give the women that I was incarcerated with a chance to go home to their families.



## I AM Missy Robinson

I was 40 years old when I was convicted of second-degree murder and arson. As a young woman, I became involved in physically and emotionally abusive relationships, which factored into my instant offense. Today, I have been incarcerated for seven years and will be eligible for parole in 2030, when I am 55 years old.

During my incarceration, I have used my faith to help cope with the trauma of life behind bars and being so far away from my family, including my four children and three grandchildren.

In addition, I have devoted my time to mentoring other women who have been recently incarcerated. My work as an intake receptionist allows me to help women “get ready” for life in prison, which includes providing all the information on the facility and programs offered.

I often advise women to “stay busy,” engage in programs, and to “behave” so they can get back to their families as soon as possible. Furthermore, I have earned my degree in social science and have participated in numerous programs, including a church initiative and an anger management program.

Upon release, I hope to continue advocating for incarcerated women in the community by joining RAPP. Most of all, I look forward to the day where I can hold my children and grandchildren close and share the love that has sustained me throughout my journey.