

## 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 Thomas Gant and Walter Ball



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**  
**Thomas**  
**Gant**

I grew up on the East side of Buffalo and had a relatively normal childhood. After I graduated high school, I was not sure where my life was going and I got caught up in a gang. I was 21 years old when I was convicted of second-degree murder for killing a rival gang member and I was sentenced to 25 years to life.

Despite being incarcerated, I still wanted to set an example for my children and devoted myself to rehabilitation. I earned a degree from Genesee Community College, where I studied technology and sign language. I became a certified ASL interpreter to support my classmates who were deaf. In addition, I began a Youth Assistance Program (“YAP”) at Wende Correctional designed around mentoring at-risk youth and dissuading them from taking similar paths to those currently incarcerated.

Upon release, I became a Community Organizer for Center for Community Alternatives and became involved in the grassroots campaign “Communities Not Cages.” The goal of my advocacy work is to encourage non-violence so that nobody else ends up in the same position as me or my victim.

Despite spending almost a quarter-century in prison, I have held on to a hope that many others have struggled to keep. I truly believe that passage of the Fair and Timely Parole Bill and the Elder Parole Bill will give currently incarcerated people hope for the possibility of returning home.



**I AM**  
**Walter**  
**Ball**

I was 18-years old when I was sentenced to 25 years to life for 2nd degree murder. I have served 22 1/2 years of my sentence. Prior to my incarceration, I was not involved in the community or educated.

While incarcerated, I earned my GED and a college degree. I became a facilitator in church and have applied to be a hospice aid. After participating in the Youth Assistance Program, a program where currently incarcerated people mentor at-risk youth to take different paths than they did, I was inspired to create my own youth advocacy organization called “Change Comes From Within,” which provides more consistent, community-based mentoring for youth. I also created a documentary called “Breaking the Cycle.”

Upon release, I have a job offer with a nonprofit that helps victims of gun violence. My goal is to start my own nonprofit where I connect kids with local businesses and entrepreneurs. I hope to help local kids who are in a situation similar to the one I was in by exposing them to different opportunities and create a better world for them.

I am resilient and find meaning in giving back to others, especially by sharing my experience with kids in similar situations.

*“I am not the worst thing I’ve ever done.”*