Every day, over 30,000 New Yorkers languish in state prisons. 75% are Black or brown.

New York’s commitment to mass incarceration helps fuel America’s shameful standing as the largest cager of human life in the world, with more than two million people detained in prisons, jails, and immigrant detention facilities throughout the country.

**Mass incarceration does not deliver justice, safety, or healing.**

It tears at the fabric of families and communities who lose loved ones, breadwinners, and caretakers to New York State prisons.

**New York’s sentencing laws are fundamentally racist and harmful.**

The Rockefeller Drug Laws—which introduced mandatory minimum sentences and dramatically increased prison sentences—were driven by a wave of anti-Black racism that New York exported across the country.

Much of this system remains today. New York continues to incarcerate people at a rate more than double that of the mid 1970s.

**A system of coerced plea deals has replaced the constitutional right to trial.**

Prosecutors use the threat of outrageously long mandatory minimums to coerce people into taking guilty pleas. 98% of convictions in our state are the result of guilty pleas—not trials—in large part due to New York’s draconian sentencing laws.

This undermines fundamental fairness and our basic constitutional rights.

**Mass incarceration is ineffective—and costly.**

It costs nearly $70,000 per year to cage a person in state prison. The result is that New York spends over $3 billion every year on a cruel, counterproductive prison system—billions that could instead be spent on education, housing, healthcare, community-based anti-violence and restorative justice programs.
Communities Not Cages is a statewide campaign building the power of people and families impacted by mass incarceration to overhaul New York’s racist and draconian sentencing laws.

Together, we call on New York to:

Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences.

Mandatory minimum sentences drive mass incarceration, strip judges of discretion, and grant outsized power to prosecutors to coerce guilty pleas.

Allow judges to review and reconsider excessive sentences.

New York has the third largest number of people serving life sentences in the country. Thousands of people are currently serving sentences of a decade or more.

Under current sentencing laws, most incarcerated people have no opportunity to demonstrate to a judge that they have changed or to ask for excessive or extreme sentences to be reconsidered to account for new laws and norms.

Support transformation and bring our loved ones home.

Following the federal 1994 Crime Bill, New York State slashed programs for incarcerated people and dramatically limited the time people could earn time off their sentences.

New York must strengthen “good time” and “merit time” laws to support personal transformation in prison and reunite families.