



**COMMUNITIES  
NOT CAGES**

# People Change. So Should New York's Sentencing Laws.

The Second Look Act (S.158/A.1283)

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# Tami Eldridge

Founder, Mother and Second Look Advocate



Tami

My name is Tami Eldridge.

**The Second Look Act is necessary because it recognizes that justice must account for growth, transformation, and present-day realities—not solely the person someone was decades ago.** For me, as a woman who has been incarcerated for over 25 years with approximately 35 years remaining before my first parole appearance, the Second Look Act represents the first meaningful opportunity to be seen for who I am today.

Appearing before a judge for a sentence review would allow me to demonstrate my rehabilitation, accountability, and transformation, as well as the difference my release would make—not only for me, but for my children, my community, and the very institutions I am committed to

returning to serve. It would give me the chance to show that continued incarceration no longer serves a rehabilitative purpose and that my remaining viable years could be better spent doing restorative work in the free world, where I once caused great harm.

The Second Look Act would also allow me to present evidence-based support from judges, commissioners, prison administrators, correction officers, civilians, academic professionals, advocates, and members of the broader community—people who have witnessed my growth firsthand and believe in my capacity for future success. Their belief is not rooted in sympathy, but in sustained observation of my conduct, leadership, and commitment to transformation.

What I am most proud of during my incarceration is my educational journey. While it is difficult to fully articulate the depth of my love for learning, education has been the cornerstone of my rehabilitation. My academic achievements and continued aspiration to earn a PhD have shaped my moral development, critical thinking, and sense of responsibility to others. I believe—and actively demonstrate—that education is the great equalizer, especially for incarcerated individuals seeking to understand their role in rebuilding communities upon reentry.

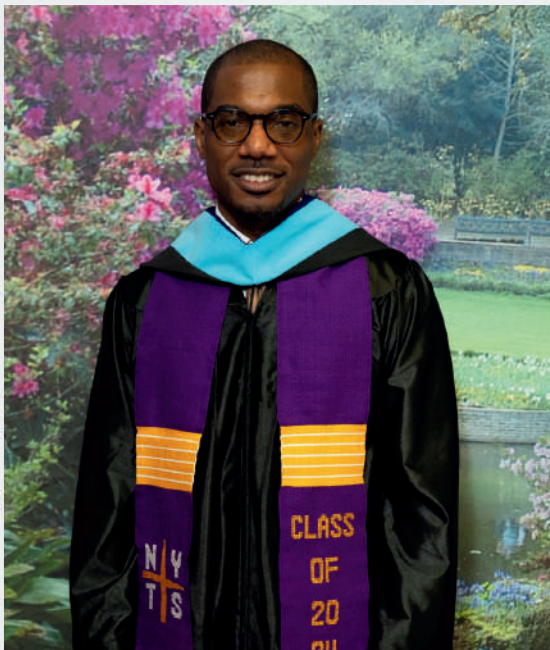
“ *Justice is not passive; it is an active, lifelong commitment to rehabilitation, transformation, and service.* ”

In 2017, I founded G\* S.T.A.R.Z. (Girls/Guys Stepping Toward A Rehabilitation Zone), a college-based, all-inclusive step team created intentionally to foster education, mentorship, leadership, accountability, and community building. The program maintains a zero-tolerance policy for disciplinary sanctions and was designed to counteract the culture of violence I once participated in. Through this work, I have gained the trust of my peers, prison administration, and commissioners, and I have witnessed firsthand how community-centered programming can shift mindsets and behaviors—one step at a time.

Today, justice and accountability mean something different to me. While I cannot speak for the victim’s family, I believe accountability requires taking full responsibility for the harm I caused and dedicating my life to preventing others from causing similar harm. Justice is not passive; it is an active, lifelong commitment to rehabilitation, transformation, and service. I will never forgive myself for the pain inflicted on the victim’s family or my own, but accountability means confronting the broader impact of my actions on the community where the crime occurred and working to repair harm wherever possible.

# Sheldon Harris

Scholar, Son and Second Look Advocate



Sheldon

My name is Sheldon Harris. I am serving a 47 year to life sentence in Sing Sing. I've been locked up since I was 23 years old. Now at 42, I won't see a parole board until October 2050. I'll be 71.

The Second Look Act presents an opportunity for individuals, like me, that have received lengthy sentences to have a judge review their progress after 10 years. It gives each judge a chance to determine if the sentence remains appropriate. Enacting the Second Look Act into law will change the culture within New York State's prison system for the better.

After coming in young, and maturing in prison, the choice to educate and better myself was personal--but still transformative. Many of my peers with lesser sentences were compelled to

attend college, vocational training, or several other paths mostly to have six-months shaved from their sentences. Yet, they caught the positivity-bug and have had their lives transformed for the better after enrollment and repetition. Others, trapped by the hopelessness of life sentences, often quip about the senselessness of education. They see no benefit in refining their outlook or value systems. Negativity carries much greater currency in their purgatory-circles.

Back in the day, education was only a necessary evil to keep my mother off my back and to get a decent job. But, even in prison, I've learned the empowerment that education affords. Learning how to think and problem solve goes a long way toward making better and more informed decisions.

As someone responsible for harm and the loss of life, I realize that the "how" or "why" makes no difference to that family. Their loved one perished. I ask that society punish me accordingly, but also leave room for redemption if my conduct and character warrant such—at a later time. For those shouldering the gravity of their errors, hopelessness often destroys their psyche's possibility for rehabilitation. Closing the door to a way out only feeds toxic cycles of negativity in prison.

Society seems open to amend its thinking and their treatment of the marginalized. Just the conversation around the Second Look Act offers hope to those that have done the right thing as a personal matter. This is how you empower everyone else to do the right thing.

“ *Learning how to think and problem solve goes a long way toward making better and more informed decisions.* ”

Can enactment of the Second Look Act shift the culture not only within New York's prison system, but also its societal fabric? I truly believe so. Individuals will be eager to better themselves, less they serve every day of a lengthy sentence, while other peers leave them behind. After incentivizing pro-social behavior and education, individuals returning to society will be better prepared to positively engage their communities. Finding hope during our worst times is transferable to our eventual return home. Other societies, and even other states and the federal system, have figured it out. Maybe this is the beginning to a different and better future. Communities Not Cages foster social integration.

# Paul Cortez

Scholar, Composer and Second Look Advocate



Paul

The Second Look Act would be life changing for me. During the 20 years I have been incarcerated, I have earned my Masters Degree in Professional Studies (MPS) of Urban Ministry, a theology degree through New York Theological Seminary (now merged with Union Theological Seminary).

I have learned how to read and write music through a music program offered by Carnegie Hall at Sing Sing. In February of 2025, I won a classical music composers' grant through the Decoda music group. That money was put toward producing a concert on May 25th 2025 at Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Room for a chamber music concert of all of my original compositions. After completing the Masters program, in March of 2023 I was

selected along with 13 other incarcerated men from Sing Sing Correctional, to be a lead speaker for the Beyond the Block event. BTB is a TEDx style event with an audience of over 200 people from the outside. The following year in 2024, I was a speaking coach for the next iteration of Beyond the Block. This journey was turned into an award winning documentary entitled "Beyond". I am one of seven men whose journey is covered in this emotional film.

In October of 2023, I was chosen to be the incarcerated choral teacher to help prepare a group of ten incarcerated men to perform the chorus part to a truncated version of the opera 'Dead Man Walking'. During the same time while at Green Haven Correctional Facility, I became a prison facilitator for the PACT (Project for A Calculated Transition) organization sponsored by Yale University.

There I taught two separate six month classes to 40 handpicked incarcerated men in each class. The classes were entitled 'Character Resurge', and 'Challenge to Change'. These programs were restorative justice based classes that helped men break habitual patterns of self-defeat, take responsibility for their actions, and move forward toward a better realization of one's potential. These programs assisted men to successfully transition back into society.

“ *There are hundreds of people who have reclaimed their humanity in the wake of tragedies.* ”

The Second Look Act would give men like me the opportunity to go before my sentencing judge and demonstrate these achievements as evidence of my growth as a person and worth as a prospective member of society. There are hundreds of others who have reclaimed their humanity in the wake of tragedies. Though nothing can make up for the devastating hurt and trauma that some of us incarcerated people have caused, the Second Look Act is a good first step in recognizing that a person is more than their worst mistakes or actions.

If we do pass the Second Look Act, I imagine many others like me will be given the opportunity to recreate our lives for the better. Families like mine would be restored. Tears of joy mixed with the release of decades of sadness would wash over us, helping us heal. Other men just stepping into the cauldron of incarceration would be given a clear path out, a roadmap for hope, where their future actions could determine a positive change for their lives. No longer would the hopeless malaise of prison overtake the majority of us who find ourselves waking up in the middle of the night in an 8' x 6' cage, defeated and on the brink of giving up. Instead, those who realize that a sea change must take place in our lives would be rewarded for actions taken to recreate ourselves into better people, spurring on a sense of meaning and purpose today for a future of our own creation, not based on the wrong choices of our past.

# Michael Hoffler

Humanitarian, Scholar and Second Look Advocate



My name is Michael Hoffler and I am serving a life sentence.

Put very simply, the passage of the Second Look Act is a life saver. I mean that literally. If and when the Second Look Act passes, New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (NYSDOCCS) and society as a whole will change for the better. With the passage of the Second Look Act, NYSDOCCS can be transformed from a place of despair, plagued by gang culture, to a place focused on rehabilitation that is inspired by hope.

Right now, NYSDOCCS is a warehouse for people who made bad decisions, which culminated in horrible actions. Many of them never had any hope to aspire to do anything but live to be 25. They grew up

with no sense of self-worth and no hope that their life will ever amount to much more than what their reality is at this very second: prison or death. For many, the system has failed them tremendously. I am referring to the school system, social services, and every other system that was put in place to ensure the pursuit of happiness and the American Dream. The criminal justice system is now tasked with doing what society and the school and social systems failed to do—prepare people to be successful members of society.

How do you give incarcerated individuals hope who never had any before prison? How do you convince people to believe in themselves when no one ever believed in them? The passage of the Second Look Act will do just that. The passage of the Second Look Act will incentivize striving to be the best person you can be.

For those of us who never really had goals or aspirations prior to incarceration, there is no better feeling than to set a goal and accomplish it. Many of us don't believe it's possible due to our past experience. The Second Look Act provides us with this opportunity. It will reward people for doing the right thing. For many of us, it will be the first time that we believe that doing the right thing is beneficial, and that sparks change not just in our ideology, but also in our actions, values, and goals.

“ *How do you give incarcerated individuals hope who never had any before prison? How do you convince people to believe?* ”

I have been incarcerated since I was 24 years young, and if the Second Look Act doesn't pass, then it may be possible that I spend the rest of my life in prison. I have spent my entire incarceration not just bettering myself, but also those around me. I believe in humanity, and I spend my time restoring other people's hope in humanity. I don't do it for myself; I do it because I know how it feels to be hopeless, and for no one to believe in you. Many of us just need a little hope to change our lives for the better. The Second Look Act gives us hope.

I now know my worth and my true value. It saddens me that society may never get to witness the man that I am today—the man who has so much to offer not just to his community, but to society as a whole. My family sees it. I will never forget how proud my children were to watch their father receive his master's degree. I will hold on to that joy and sense of pride for eternity. My family loves and respects the person I am today, but that's not enough. I owe my community and society more. I have a responsibility to fulfill to the people that I can only truly do once returned to society. Without the passage of the Second Look Act, I may never have the opportunity.

Please do not view the Second Look Act as a get-out-of-jail-free card. Instead, view it as a tool to not only enhance public safety, but to also increase the humanity we have for one another. The Second Look Act is about seeking out rehabilitation and doing everything in our power to be better parents, children, aunts, uncles, neighbors, and overall human beings.

# Alex Martinez

Second Look Advocate



**Alex**

My name is Alex Martinez, I am 34 years old and currently residing in Sing Sing Correctional Facility. I have been incarcerated for 11 years, and was sentenced to 20 years.

If we truly want to change both culture and mindset, bills like the Second Look Act are essential because they offer hope to everyone. Believe me, a person without hope can and often will bring despair upon their community, their loved ones, and most importantly, themselves.

Most of us come from broken homes, similar backgrounds and environments where trauma, pain, and violence were constant. Being vulnerable in a hardened place like prison is extremely difficult. I remember a time when I wanted to die, not passively, but by causing so much destruction that I would

be killed violently. I even told my family so they could prepare themselves and forget about me. That was once a real goal of mine, because at the time, it felt like the only escape from the darkness I was living in.

The Second Look Act has the potential to combat the negativity that exists within prison because it sends a clear message: that people are being seen, reviewed, and evaluated. It places responsibility back in the hands of the incarcerated. If a person truly seeks mercy and redemption, returning to society becomes something they must earn through growth and accountability. Even when individuals begin this process with other motives, I have witnessed the power of these spaces to change lives. I have seen people enter programs for other reasons and have an entire new

perspective on life. Many negative attitudes stem from unresolved trauma, which causes people to cope in destructive ways. This bill will help broken individuals find themselves sooner, creating a powerful shift in the paradigm of prison culture.

“ *If a person truly seeks mercy and redemption, returning to society becomes something they must earn* ”

Personally, I have felt deep remorse since the incident that placed me here. I did not know how to redeem myself. I apologized the best way I knew how, yet I understood the painful truth that once a life is taken, there is no way to replace someone so precious. That reality left me deeply wounded, filled with regret, and forced me to appreciate life in a way I never had before. It pushed me to think about how I could pay it forward and ensure I was not remembered only for the worst act of my life.

I thought about his family and everyone who ever loved him. The fact that I left his children orphans. I thought about his siblings, his mother. I thought about my mother, who tried her best to raise five boys while enduring years of abuse. I thought about the pain I caused my loved ones, especially my wife, a woman who stood by me even when I tried to push her away because I believed my life was over. I recently became a father, and while it is a blessing it is also bittersweet. I have yet to hold my son nine months after his birth. Missing my wife's entire twenties and my son's first nine months of life has been incredibly painful. But it is not comparable to the pain I caused his family, a pain I am familiar with because I now have lost so many friends and members during this incarceration.

Justice is not achieved solely through punishment. Justice is served when an individual fully acknowledges the harm they caused, experiences genuine remorse, and pays a meaningful price while committing to lasting change. An eye for an eye may satisfy anger, but accountability, rehabilitation, and transformation are what truly serve justice and protect society.

# Antonio Pegues

Leader, Father and Second Look Advocate



**Antonio**

In my opinion, I believe The Second Look Act to be necessary as a means to infuse a sense of humanity into the rehabilitation process because the nature of the offense never changes, an individual can evolve into their true potential. If enacted, the Second Look Act has the ability to allow incarcerated individuals, who have put in the work, return to and become productive members of society.

Furthermore, these individuals will pay taxes into the socioeconomic system, instead of draining the already stretched budget and staff of the Department of Corrections and by proxy the great State of New York. By permitting individuals to reenter society the Dept. of Corrections and therefore the State will be able to allocate funds and resources to better

serve those who are in its charge (i.e. Primary/Secondary Education, Relevant Vocational Skills, Mental Health Services). If required to serve my sentence in its entirety (50 years, 8 months and 15 days), I would be approximately 73 years old upon release. At that age, even with a litany of tangible/intangible skills or college degree(s), I would be an immediate strain on the State. With continued monitoring, rising medical costs, housing necessities, and limited employment options at that advanced age, my chances of survival are very slim.

Personally, the Second Look Act would provide me with the chance to quite literally pay my debt by putting my skill set to use in the community. It would give my mother back her son, my siblings, their big brother, my wife, her husband. Most importantly, it would give my daughter, Denaya, age 20, back to her father before her 50th birthday.

Furthermore, I can demonstrate to his Hon. David Sullivan, J. that I heard his words and didn't waste time, that I understand the importance and necessity of the rule of law and that I used my sentence as motivation to mature intellectually and emotionally, giving me a great foundation from which I can build.

I am proud of the work I have done inside. I have been part of the Yale Prison Project, distributed Christmas gifts to the children of incarcerated people, and represented their concerns during my tenure as a member of the Inmate Liaison Committee. I am specifically proud of the moment when my daughter told me that she had chosen to attend Mercy University in Manhattan, and the excitement we shared when she learned that I too was enrolled at Mercy through Hudson Link. Go Mavericks!

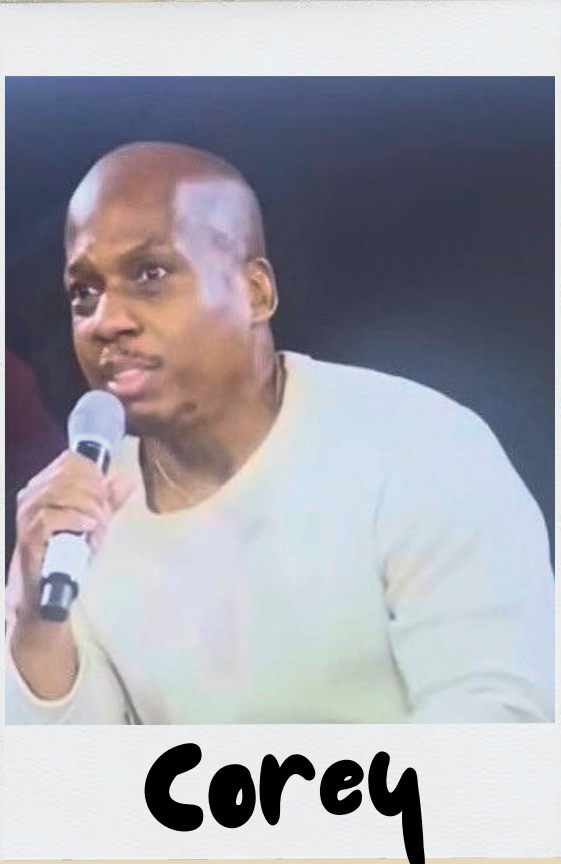
“ *The Second Look Act would give my mother back her son, my siblings, their big brother, my wife, her husband.* ”

When I look back at my 22 year old self I am honestly aware of my deficiencies, my feeling of being owed success, my inability to recognize myself in the mirror and my failure to think critically in high stress situations lead me here. Now 21 years later, I've come to realize that there is nothing more satisfying than finishing my work, days prior to a deadline. During this time I've come to the conclusion that I enjoy working with people in an effort to develop new ideas and concepts that address common/complex concerns. Growing up I hated school. Now, I plan to achieve my PhD in Psychology. Moreover, I am confident in not knowing something, which is amazing because then I get an opportunity to listen and learn a different perspective. I've built a network of family and friends who readily help me to understand how they navigate everyday life. I know my potential is endless because I no longer fear the unknown.

Let's work together to develop a system that is conducive and rehabilitative.

# Corey Jackson

Scholar, Composer and Second Look Advocate



My name is Corey Jackson, I currently reside at Sing Sing Correctional Facility. I have been incarcerated for over thirty three years now. I was eighteen years young when arrested, I am now fifty two years old, serving a sentence of 102 years to life. My parole date is 2094.

However prison doesn't speak for me, and can never show who and what I am. I don't have as many good years before me like I do behind me. The Second Look Act, which allows incarcerated individuals the opportunity to possibly have their sentence reviewed, and reduced after ten years. If passed, this bill will be monumental, and instill so much hope for humanity. Family ties, and friendships that seem to weaken over years can be restored and strengthened.

Too often Justice for many has been used as a tool to shield revenge, and focus on punishment. The passing of this bill can transform that narrative, and show that mercy, compassion, and forgiveness have the ability to transform lives when put into practice. It will show that none is irredeemable, and humanity has not lost their humanity.

Throughout the course of my incarceration I have done a lot of self examination and self improvement on so many levels. I am no longer the 18 year old kid from thirty three years ago. Every cell in my body is different. And my focus is making things better for future generations, because we all benefit from those (known or unknown) people who sacrifice so much to make this world better.

I am not yet where I need to be, but certainly not where I was. I hope and pray that this bill is passed.



# PEOPLE CHANGE. SO SHOULD NEW YORK'S SENTENCING LAWS.



**COMMUNITIES  
NOT CAGES**

**TAKE ACTION**

[communitiesnotcagesny.org](http://communitiesnotcagesny.org)