



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**HEAD OF NEW YORKERS UNITED FOR JUSTICE  
TESTIFIES DURING NEW YORK STATE SENATE  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON CRIME VICTIMS,  
CRIME AND CORRECTION REGARDING THE  
COVID-19 OUTBREAK IN STATE PRISONS**

***NYUJ Urged For Plan to Safeguard Extremely Vulnerable Population  
During Pretrial, Incarceration, Reentry & Parole***

***NYUJ to NYS Senate: Urgency is Critical With At Least 700  
Incarcerated Individuals and 1300 Correctional Staff Members  
Testing Positive for COVID-19***

(NEW YORK, NY) -- Alexander Horwitz, executive director of New Yorkers United for Justice, New York's leading criminal justice reform coalition, today testified before the Senate Committee on Crime Victims, Crime and Correction and Committee on Corrections and Health to make the case for an immediate plan to protect some of the most at-risk New Yorkers, those who are incarcerated or work in New York's state prisons system.

Unlike New York, many states around the country have incorporated expert advice to test all of their incarcerated populations as efforts to mitigate inevitable illnesses and deaths in prisons into their larger COVID-19 response. Throughout the pandemic, the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision's testing has been haphazard, which has resulted in weeks of meager

testing and only three significant attempts at large scale testing. New York is obligated to keep the people in its care safe, yet a lack of testing neglects this responsibility of the state. The full testimony can be found [HERE](#).

“In almost every area of civic life, mass testing has been the rule – and the key to slowing COVID’s terrible progress through our state. There is one exception and, predictably and tragically, it leaves behind a group of citizens who, even before COVID, were in desperate need of quality, compassionate health care: incarcerated New Yorkers,” **Alexander Horwitz, executive director of New Yorkers United for Justice**. “New York has only conducted what could be considered large scale testing three times in the last six months, once in July - four months into this pandemic - when they conducted tests of all incarcerated individuals over the age of fifty-five; once again in August when we believe they tested a group of asymptomatic individuals; and last week, in the run up to this hearing, when DOCCS reported having conducted 3,580 tests between September 15th and September 21st.

Undertesting throughout DOCCS poses a threat to all communities that surround the state’s prisons. NYUJ calls for DOCCS to present a comprehensive, transparent plan that includes administering COVID-19 tests to all incarcerated individuals to combat coronavirus throughout the system. Any substantial plan from DOCCS must include testing every incarcerated individual to establish a baseline of viral impact and continuing to conduct follow up exams to monitor the threat of coronavirus in state correctional facilities. For months, DOCCS’ own data has demonstrated an inconsistent, underwhelming approach to this public health crisis, jeopardizing prison safety during this global pandemic. New Yorkers United for Justice has called for not only a mass testing since March, but a publicly disclosed plan to prevent the spread of coronavirus in correctional facilities and the statewide criminal justice system.

**Horwitz continued:** “The lack of commitment to regular, large-scale testing in corrections places New York far behind other states like Florida, Texas, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Missouri, and our closest regional partner New Jersey -- that is currently testing its entire prison population for the third time.”

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**About New Yorker United for Justice (NYUJ):**

New Yorkers United for Justice is a statewide coalition comprised of local and national non-profit organizations committed to supporting a movement that will bring much-needed criminal justice reform to New York State and ensure that policies promote safety and fairness. NYUJ aims for legislative urgency to fix a broken criminal justice system that punishes the poor and communities of color, tears families apart, and makes New Yorkers less safe. NYUJ believes that a system that ensures equal access to justice for anyone accused in New York State,

regardless of age, race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin or religion, must be the standard.