



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Column: State government must stand up for crime victims, not criminals

PAMELA HELMING March 21, 2025

| ISSUE: **PUBLIC SAFETY**

COLUMN
— *from* —
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Sam Nordquist endured atrocities that no living being should ever have to endure. Beaten, sexually assaulted, tortured and starved. The sick people who did this to Sam are also accused of involving two young children in this horrendous behavior. Those children's lives are now forever changed.

The individuals responsible for these heinous and unspeakable acts should spend the rest of their lives behind bars. But if convicted, will they?

Over the past several years, I have been outspoken about the need to hold criminals accountable for their actions. People like those who killed Sam. Or the individual recently charged with murdering 63-year-old Myrtle Watson in her home. Rochester police referred to the suspect as a violent predicate felon with 49 prior convictions, including five felonies.

And what about those responsible for shooting at innocent people at Maplewood Park in Rochester last summer, killing two and injuring five others. Or the shooter who took the life of Rochester Police Officer Anthony Mazurkiewicz.

As the list of crime victims continues to grow, there is a dangerous push in Albany to make it easier for violent criminals to return to our communities and walk our streets.

One such effort is Elder Parole, a bill currently under consideration in the New York State Legislature. Elder Parole mandates that any incarcerated person who is 55 years or older, and has served at least 15 years of their sentence, is entitled to an interview with the Board of Parole to determine if they should be released to community supervision. There are no exceptions for those convicted of exceptionally heinous or violent crimes.

It is deeply concerning that this bill now has 32 Senate sponsors, more than enough to pass if it comes to the floor for a vote. If Elder Parole becomes law, the individuals who tortured and murdered Sam, and the convicted murderer who killed Officer Mazurkiewicz, could eventually be released back into society.

Is that justice?

An equally disturbing bill gaining traction in the Legislature is the Second Look Act. This legislation would allow individuals, including violent felons who have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms of a decade or more, to petition for a review and potential reduction of their sentence. Alarming, the chief judge of the Court of Appeals, New York State's highest court, has publicly expressed support for this legislation.

If it becomes law, the Second Look Act could allow some of the most dangerous individuals in our state to walk free.

While these criminal-first policies are being pushed by the Majority in the Legislature, the Governor is also proposing to close up to five additional prisons.

It is reasonable for New Yorkers to ask: is public safety a priority in New York State?

Why this broad movement to release criminals early, disempower law enforcement, disregard jury decisions, shutter prisons, ignore the violence inside state correctional facilities?

Where is the concern for victims of crime over the perpetrators of crime?

We cannot ignore the danger of these reckless policies and the devastating consequences for our families and communities. We must stand together to protect innocent people and ensure that those who commit the most horrific crimes remain behind bars where they belong.

We owe it to Sam, to Myrtle, to Officer Mazurkiewicz, and to all victims of violent crime to ensure that justice is served – and that the most dangerous among us are never given a second chance to destroy innocent lives.