

How New York's Legislature Addressed the Correctional Crisis in Its 2025 Session

New legislation addresses key accountability and oversight challenges in the state's prison system.



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Two high-profile [deaths](#) [\[link-1\]](#) of men in custody and an [unauthorized strike](#) [\[link-2\]](#) by corrections officers in the last year exhibited the systemic crisis within New York State's prisons. The [legislature responded](#) [\[link-3\]](#) in June with a package of laws that include measures seeking to

strengthen oversight of the state's correctional facilities to improve accountability and transparency. Gov. Kathy Hochul signed the package into law after negotiating [some changes](#) [\[link-4\]](#) to the legislature's original bills.

In December 2024, Robert Brooks was beaten to death by officers at

Marcy Correctional Facility in Marcy, NY. A few weeks later, corrections officers went on strike and demanded better pay, improved safety conditions, and the repeal of limits on the amount of time incarcerated people can be placed in solitary confinement — a restriction established in 2021 by the [Halt Act](#) [\[link-5\]](#) .

The strike lasted [22 days](#) [\[link-6\]](#) and coincided with more [deaths](#) [\[link-7\]](#) in custody, including that of Messiah Nantwi who was fatally assaulted in March 2025 by officers at Mid-State Correctional in Marcy, NY. The strike [spotlighted](#) [\[link-8\]](#) how chronic understaffing, extensive mandatory overtime, and poor morale endangered staff and residents of these facilities. The deaths of Brooks and Nantwi were just two of many in-custody deaths that brought to focus endemic violence

and weak oversight in New York’s prisons.

To help address these issues, the state legislature voted to [expand the State Commission of Correction](#) [\[link-9\]](#) from three to nine members and mandate diverse representation, including formerly incarcerated people, public health professionals, and civil rights advocates. However, the governor required the expansion to be limited to [five total commissioners](#) [\[link-10\]](#) and a provision that would have reduced the governor’s appointment authority was also removed from the bill. One of the commission’s core responsibilities is to monitor correctional facilities and their compliance with safety and care standards, a mandate it has [struggled to meet](#) [\[link-11\]](#) with limited capacity and resources. The package also [expands the authority](#) [\[link-12\]](#) of the Correctional Association of New

York to independently conduct inspections of facilities with only 24 hours notice, reduced from the 72 hours notice the association was previously required to provide. The change allows inspectors to speak privately with incarcerated people and staff, an issue that has inhibited investigations in the past. Notably, the legislature increased the commission's budget by [\\$3 million](#) [\[link-13\]](#) and gave an additional [\\$3 million](#) [\[link-14\]](#) in new funding to the association to support these increased responsibilities. Even more, the law requires quarterly Special Investigations Office [reports](#) [\[link-15\]](#) to the legislature and governor on complaints, investigations, staffing, and enforcement actions.

The state legislature also addressed the need to improve transparency around in-custody deaths. A lack of [surveillance cameras](#) [\[link-16\]](#) —

either because they were malfunctioning or never installed in the first place — was identified as a contributing factor in last year's fatal incidents. The new law requires state prisons to install full-time [surveillance cameras](#) [\[link-17\]](#) in all areas except cell interiors, showers, and toilet areas, and establish a body-worn camera pilot program.

Now, when an in-custody death involving correctional officers occurs, a number of steps must be taken. Administrators must make a “good faith effort” to provide the attorney general's Office of Special Investigation with unredacted [video footage](#) [\[link-18\]](#) of the death. There must also be [public notice](#) [\[link-19\]](#) about any such death, and the next of kin must be notified within 48 hours — an increase from 24 hours in the original legislation. Further, a comprehensive Department of Corrections and Community

Supervision investigation must be completed, including [enhanced autopsy](#) [\[link-20\]](#) review and special reports. The State Commission of Correction is also required to publish a report releasing their findings concerning the causes of deaths in custody over the past decade and make recommendations to address key safety concerns.

Despite these improvements, issues remain. The [Halt Act](#) [\[link-21\]](#) was front and center during the strike, as correctional staff blamed restrictions on solitary confinement for exacerbating understaffing, increasing violence, and disrupting state operations. However, the 2025 package does little to bolster the Halt Act's implementation and compliance. In fact, a temporary suspension of some provisions of the law was included as part of an [agreement](#) [\[link-22\]](#) to end the strike even as people continue to

suffer under [inhumane](#) [\[link-23\]](#) conditions.

Further, the Halt Act requires several hours of out-of-cell programming for incarcerated people in segregated housing. But the New York inspector general's [2024 review](#) [\[link-24\]](#) revealed that antiquated paper-based recordkeeping made it nearly impossible to monitor compliance with the requirement of improving access to rehabilitative services for segregated populations, one of the core objectives of the law. The review underscored the urgent need to modernize corrections data infrastructure.

For the Halt Act and other innovative measures to work, more must be done to directly respond to the [working conditions](#) [\[link-25\]](#) cited during the strike. The safety of incarcerated individuals is inextricably linked to the well-being of correctional staff. New

procedures are needed to improve staffing, implement reasonable shift lengths, and equip correctional staff with better tools to maintain security in facilities.

The prison oversight package, while laudable, stops short of responding to key issues like overcrowding, poor conditions, and the difficulties many formerly incarcerated people face upon release. Oversight is vital, but building rehabilitative pathways and safely reducing the number of people behind bars in New York is critical. There are bills this legislative session that [did not pass](#) [\[link-26\]](#) that aimed to do just that. The [Earned Time Act](#) [\[link-27\]](#), for example, would increase the amount of good time credit incarcerated people can earn for early release — an incentive that encourages good behavior in prison while also safely reducing the population. This can build on Gov. Kathy Hochul's [executive](#)

[proposal](#) [\[link-28\]](#) approved by the legislature, which grants the state's corrections commissioner authority to increase the number of programs eligible for earned good time credit.

The [Second Look Act](#) [\[link-29\]](#) addresses harsh sentencing practices, allowing people sentenced to more than 10 years in prison to apply for a sentence reduction. Both the [Fair & Timely Parole Act](#) [\[link-30\]](#) and the [Elder Parole Act](#) [\[link-31\]](#) expand eligibility for supervised release, with the latter focusing on people ages 55 and older. All these proposals would bring long-term progress to New York's correctional practices and create more pathways for release.

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New York stands at a pivotal moment. The legislature has taken courageous steps in response to deeply troubling events. But to truly lead, New York must continue to commit funding and resources to

support the reforms in the prison oversight package and pass laws

that promote rehabilitation and dignity in its correctional system.

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Links

link-1: deaths <https://www.uticaod.com/story/news/local/2025/05/27/robert-brooks-messiah-nantwi-cases-mary-midstate-prisons/83817350007/>

link-2: unauthorized strike <https://www.vera.org/news/when-new-york-corrections-officers-went-on-strike-incarcerated-people-continued-to-suffer>

link-3: legislature responded <https://nysfocus.com/2025/06/13/prison-reform-hochul-new-york-doccs>

link-4: some changes <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/politics/2025/12/19/hochul-signs-amended-prison-reform-package-into-law>

link-5: Halt Act <https://www.justicecenter.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2024/11/halt-2023-with-doccs-response.pdf?inline=1>

link-6: 22 days <https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/new-yorks-prison-strike-poised-to-end-monday/>

link-7: deaths https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/04/nyregion/ny-prison-strike-guards.html&ved=2ahUKEwj91tHC_J6OAxXok4kEHccbL8gQFnoECBsQAQ&usg=AOvVaw3VHNGawuWFe9MoMcvvWvYB

link-8: spotlighted https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2022/05/09/correctional_jobs/

- link-9:** expand the State Commission of Correction <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/S856>
- link-10:** five total commissioners <https://queenseagle.com/all/2025/12/29/advocates-condemn-hollow-prison-reform-bill>
- link-11:** struggled to meet <https://nysfocus.com/2023/12/18/new-york-jail-prison-correction-scoc>
- link-12:** expands the authority <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/S8415>
- link-13:** \$3 million <https://cbs6albany.com/news/local/new-york-advocates-demand-overhaul-of-prison-watchdog-amid-rising-deaths>
- link-14:** \$3 million <https://www.correctionalassociation.org/press-releases-archive/cany-applauds-budget-investments-in-oversight-urges-continued-reform>
- link-15:** reports <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/S8415>
- link-16:** surveillance cameras <https://nysfocus.com/2025/02/03/robert-brooks-doccs-prisons-cameras>
- link-17:** surveillance cameras <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/S8415>
- link-18:** video footage <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/S8415>
- link-19:** public notice <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/S8415>
- link-20:** enhanced autopsy <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/S8415>
- link-21:** Halt Act <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/01/nyregion/solitary-confinement-restricted.html>
- link-22:** agreement <https://doccs.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2025/03/moa-doccs-nyscopba-3.8.2025.pdf?inline=1>
- link-23:** inhumane <https://www.timesunion.com/capitol/article/ny-prison-staffing-crisis-persists-fight-halt-20780796.php>
- link-24:** 2024 review <https://ig.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2024/08/nys-oig-doccs-halt-report-8.5.24.pdf?inline=1>
- link-25:** working conditions <https://apnews.com/article/hochul-prisons-national-guard-auburn-07b56930ca84293fc5da05cd5f6cb28c>

link-26: did not pass <https://www.cityandstateny.com/policy/2025/06/parole-and-sentencing-reform-left-out-omnibus-prison-reform-bill/405975/>

link-27: Earned Time Act <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/A1085>

link-28: executive proposal <https://www.nysenate.gov/sites/default/files/open-data/fy-2026-adopted-budget-report-may-8-2025.pdf?inline=1>

link-29: Second Look Act <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/S158>

link-30: Fair & Timely Parole Act <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/S159>

link-31: Elder Parole Act <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/S454>