

Spotlight on: Jayette Lansbury

“Everyone Deserves a Second Chance”

Jayette Lansbury traveled to Albany more than two dozen times during the just-concluded legislative session, part of her long effort to reform what she calls “a system of perpetual punishment that keeps people trapped in prison.” Among those people is her son, who is both on the autism spectrum and has mental illness and has been incarcerated for 26 years.

Jayette has been a member of the Huntington chapter’s Issues and Advocacy Committee for 10 years. Her focus is the criminal justice system and its intersection with mental illness. She is also a member of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Suffolk County, a member of the NY State Psychiatric Correctional Advisory Committee, the Huntington Task Force on Disabilities, the Huntington Women’s Advisory Council and a Regional Coordinator for the Alliance for Rights & Recovery.

She provides a statistical picture of the prison population that reveals [the close connection between mental illness and running afoul of the law](#). “Sixty-five percent of the adult prison population lives with mental illness and 20-35% of the younger prison population live on the autism spectrum,” says Jayette.

“Another 25% are veterans living with PTSD and other disorders,” she continues. “So almost everyone in the system has some kind of issue.” According to the Veterans Administration, [veterans with PTSD are 60% more likely to be incarcerated](#) than veterans who don’t suffer from PTSD.

To remedy this situation, Jayette has been lobbying for several reforms including the Earned Time Act, which would give prisoners who have served long sentences a chance to ask a judge to look at their record in prison and be considered for release; The Fair and Timely Parole Act, that would give people who have served over 20 years a chance to re-enter society; and the Elder Parole Act, aimed at prisoners who are 55 and older and “no longer a danger to society.”

All these bills are supported by the Huntington League and the NY State League of Women Voters and were close to passage during the last legislative session.

“It’s not that we excuse them for what they did,” says Jayette. “But people are not their past. And the cost of keeping people inside jail could pay for treatment outside. Everyone deserves a second chance at life.”

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