STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY
MARCH 26, 2025

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chair Salaam and the members of the Committee on Public Safety for holding this vote.

Today, we are voting on Resolution 415-A, which calls on the State Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign Senate Bill S.2240 and Assembly Bill A.5414, which would remove the lifetime ban on jury service for people convicted of felonies. Jury service, much like voting, is a cornerstone of our democratic system. In New York, people who have been convicted of felonies are barred from serving on juries, regardless of the offense or how long ago the conviction took place.

First and foremost, a felony conviction does not make a person less qualified to serve on a jury. People who have served their time have paid their debt to society and should no longer be tethered to a mistake that they made for the rest of their lives. Being excluded from fully participating in public life, like being barred from voting or serving on a jury, only furthers their detachment from their community. Excluding people with felony convictions only furthers the disenfranchisement of people of more color—especially Black people—as they are disproportionately likely to be criminalized, prosecuted, and incarcerated.[1] In Manhattan alone, Black people are convicted of crimes at a rate 21.3 times higher than white people. This country has a long history of excluding Black people from juries, and a ban on jury service based on criminal convictions only furthers this. Lifting this ban will be a step forward for all New Yorkers.

I want to thank the sponsors of the bill at the state level and my colleagues in the council who co-sponsored this resolution.

Thank you.

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[1] https://www.nyclu.org/commentary/racial-disparity-across-new-york-truly-jarring