Testimony before the

New York City Council

Committee on Criminal Justice

Chair Selvena Brooks-Powers

Committee on Finance

Chair Linda Lee

By

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Good morning, Chair Brooks-Powers and Chair Lee, and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Finance. I am Stanley Richards, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Correction, and I am joined today by members of the Department's leadership team. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department's Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget and the work ahead of us to strengthen safety, stability, and accountability across our jail system.

Fiscal Year 2026 Highlights

When I appeared before the Council in March for the Preliminary Budget hearing, I spoke about the vision and priorities that would guide my leadership. I said then that transforming a system like ours is not like turning a speedboat — it is like turning a cruise ship. That remains true today. Meaningful change in a system as large and complex as ours requires discipline, consistency, partnership, and sustained effort. It requires a balance of bold urgency and quiet patience.

In the first four months of my tenure, I have spent a great deal of time listening and learning. I have listened to the dedicated staff who work tirelessly in the jails every day. I have listened to people in our care. I have listened to advocates, providers, labor partners, oversight bodies, and many members of this Council. Listening and learning is quiet work, but it is not idleness. Listening matters because people closest to the work often understand the challenges best, and we cannot undo harm or hope for a better future if we do not understand the challenges that led us to the place we are in today. While listening may be quiet work, it is not static work. My team and I have been moving with urgency on issues that matter because the stakes are high every single day.

Over these first months, we have taken meaningful steps toward preparing the Department for the future while addressing immediate operational needs. We opened the City's first Outposted Therapeutic Housing Unit at Bellevue Hospital, creating a new model of care for people in custody with complex medical needs and expanding access to specialized treatment in an environment designed to support health and dignity. We reached an important milestone in the borough-based jail transition with the topping off of the Brooklyn facility and continue planning efforts with our sister agencies to prepare for one of the most significant transitions in this city's history. We also welcomed 261 new correction officers into our ranks—the Department's largest graduating academy class in nearly seven years—an important investment in rebuilding our workforce and supporting safe operations.

At the same time, we have continued engaging collaboratively with the Remediation Manager and his team as they onboard and establish their operations. We view this work as complementary to our broader goals of strengthening accountability, improving operational effectiveness, reducing violence, and creating systems that are sustainable over time. Real progress requires partnership, and that includes our partnership with the Court, the Remediation Manager, and the Federal Monitor.

Let me speak candidly about where we are as an agency so that our conversations today are grounded in a shared understanding of current conditions. The Department does not have control over who is in our care or for how long, but we are a critical player in ensuring that there is a strong continuum of care before, during, and after one's incarceration. Currently, we have approximately 6,700 people in our care, which is significantly above where we were several years ago, despite having fewer staff. We need support from all of our partners to bring that number down to promote safer operations in the near term, and to get to the number we envision for the borough-based jails. Continuing to manage a population this large creates operational pressure across nearly every aspect of the Department's work, from housing and transportation to medical escorts, programming, and supervision. But population growth alone does not fully describe the challenge we are managing.

Today's population presents increasingly complex behavioral health and service needs. Many individuals come into our care experiencing housing instability or homelessness, substance misuse, a history of trauma, and limited social supports. More than 4,100 people in our care—approximately sixty percent of the population—have a Brad-H designation, indicating increased interaction with mental health services. In addition, 20 percent of people in our care are identified by our partners at H+H/Correctional Health Services ("CHS") as having serious mental illness. These realities shape how we staff facilities, how we coordinate movement, how we deliver programming, and how we partner with CHS and others to provide care before, during, and after incarceration.

This is why I continue to say that safety and humanity are not competing values. They depend on one another. Our staff are asked every day to manage situations involving complex human needs while also maintaining safe and secure operations. Correction officers are not social workers, but the reality is they often find themselves operating in environments that require compassion, patience, communication, and partnership in addition to traditional correctional responsibilities. They have one of the toughest jobs in the city and we need to support them in this work.

That is why one of my priorities continues to be returning to what I have called Corrections 101. Safe jails begin with the fundamentals. Housing areas must be properly supervised. Required tours must be completed. Services must be delivered consistently. Concerns must be elevated and addressed appropriately. Policies must be understood and carried out. Those things are not small. Many of the issues identified repeatedly across oversight reports, recommendations, and operational reviews ultimately point back to correctional fundamentals—communication, supervision, responsiveness, accountability, and consistency.

None of this happens without a robust workforce. One of the things that has impressed me most during my time as Commissioner is the strength and diversity of the people who choose to work in this Department. Women play a critical role throughout this agency at every level of service, and make up nearly half of the uniformed workforce. Women serve disproportionately in unformed leadership as supervisors, Wardens, Deputy Wardens, and executive leaders—including our Chief of Department. We have built a leadership bench that increasingly reflects the workforce and the city we serve. The number of women in uniformed leadership positions is something we should recognize—not because leadership looks one way, but because talent and opportunity should not. Building the future of this Department means ensuring talented people see corrections as a profession where they can lead, grow, and shape outcomes.

That brings me to something I know many people have questions about—the reduction in budgeted uniformed headcount reflected in the Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Plan. I want to address this directly because I know our staff are paying attention. Uniformed staff are not being terminated, and no positions are being eliminated to achieve this reduction. The adjustment reflected in the Fiscal Year 2026 and 2027 budgets are a reduction in vacant budgeted positions based on current recruitment and attrition projections, and alignment with where we realistically expect staffing levels to be. We are currently operating below our authorized staffing levels and have been for quite some time, and have been candid that recruitment and retention remain difficult not only in New York City, but across corrections and law enforcement nationally. We're grateful that Governor Hochul, with the support and advocacy of Mayor Mamdani, restored the 20-year service retirement for our uniformed staff. Our members of service deserve parity with other uniformed services, and we're hopeful that this restoration will strengthen workforce stability and improve DOC's ability to recruit and retain experienced staff.

Health and safety is more than a number. If we want people to stay, we must create conditions where staff feel supported, safe, respected, and able to build careers in this agency. Our staff and their families should expect that they come home safe at the end of every tour.

That expectation is fundamental. This adjustment does not reflect a reduced commitment to our workforce or to this fundamental expectation. In fact, the opposite is true. For years, the borough-based jail transition has contemplated gradual staffing efficiencies over time as infrastructure changes and operations modernize. But our immediate focus remains on recruiting officers, retaining experienced staff, reducing unnecessary overtime, supporting wellness, and making this work sustainable over the long term.

The Department's Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget

Before I close, I will briefly turn to the fiscal year 2027 Executive Budget. For fiscal year 2027, the Department of Correction budget is $ 1.26 billion. The vast majority of this—82 percent—is allocated for Personal Services, and 18 percent for Other than Personal Services. The fiscal year 2027 Executive Budget decreased by $121 million compared to the fiscal year 2026 budget of $ 1.38 billion. Some of the increases to the Executive Plan include:

- Bellevue Outposted Therapeutic Housing Unit ("Bellevue OTHU") uniformed staff meal stipends, $78.5 thousand in fiscal year 2026, and $314 thousand in fiscal years 2027, baselined;
- One time Bellevue OTHU accelerated opening funding of $2.1 million in fiscal year 2026 only, which also covered rehabilitation housing at the George R. Vierno Center and West Facility in preparation for closing of the North Infirmary Command;
- A one time $23.7 million increase in fiscal year 2027 to replace 1,800 existing cell doors on Rikers Island with high-security doors; and
- A one time $2.8 million increase in fiscal year 2027 for facility maintenance and the purchase of contraband detection mattresses.

The fiscal year 2027 Executive Budget also included reductions as part of the Mayor's Executive Order 12 citywide savings initiative. These savings did not compromise safety or services to the people in our care. Some of the savings include:

- Contractual efficiencies totaling approximately $6 million in fiscal year 2026 and $3 million in 2027;
- $5.2 million in civilian overtime reductions in fiscal year 2027; and
- The reduction of 386 unoccupied uniformed budgeted lines in Fiscal Year 2026 and an additional 200 next fiscal year, totaling 586 unoccupied lines in fiscal year 2027 baselined. These savings amount to approximately $10.1 and $32.3 million in fiscal years 2026 and 2027 respectively.

Capital Funding

The fiscal year 2026 Executive Capital Budget and Commitment Plan totals $11.9 billion, which covers Fiscal Years 2026 through 2036. As of the FY26 Executive Budget, the majority of capital funding is tied to the borough-based jails program which totals $ $11.5 billion over the ten-year plan and is allocated as follows:

- Brooklyn Facility - $1.7 billion
- Manhattan Facility - $ $3.7 billion
- Bronx Facility - $ $2.6 billion
- Queens Facility - $3.3 billion

Headcount

We continue to work diligently to attract and retain both civilian and uniformed staff. The Department's total authorized headcount as of FY27 Executive Financial Plan is: 8,426, which includes 6,674 uniformed positions and 1,752 civilian positions. Despite the uniform unoccupied line reductions, our actual uniformed staffing levels remain well below our authorized headcount. The Department will continue recruitment at full force through investing in aggressive advertising and marketing campaigns to attract new staff

Conclusion

The Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget reflects the reality of operating a correctional system in this moment: population pressures, aging infrastructure, staffing challenges, preparation for borough-based jails, and continued investment in modernization and safety. It reflects difficult choices and a commitment to operating responsibly while continuing to move this Department forward.

We remain committed to closing Rikers Island and preparing for borough-based jails. And we remain committed to ensuring safe and humane conditions for staff and people in our care throughout that transition.

Let me close where I began: this work is difficult. There are no shortcuts and there are no quick fixes. But I believe progress is possible when we are honest about the challenges we face, disciplined in how we respond, and committed to keeping people at the center of our decisions. Putting people first is not simply a slogan. It means supporting staff so they can support others. It means creating safer conditions. It means investing in people and expecting excellence from one another. And when we do that, safety improves, services improve, outcomes improve, and public trust improves.

Thank you for your partnership and your continued engagement. My colleagues and I are available to answer your questions.