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Remarks before the Committee on Criminal Justice re: Int 1535-A

June 25, 2019

The recent death of Layleen Polanco, a young transgender woman in custody at Rikers, represents a terrible failure by the City of New York. This tragedy underscores the need for greater accountability and transparency on how the City treats transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and intersex people in its custody.

My legislation, Int 1535, will require the Board of Correction to convene a task force to review the Department of Correction's policies relative to this particularly vulnerable population and make recommendations for immediate improvement. Critically, this task force will bring people with lived experiences to the table, as well as experts in transgender policy to ensure safe, humane, and respectful treatment of TGNCNBI persons in custody.

This is one step of many that are necessary to reform our broken criminal justice system. The circumstances surrounding Layleen Polanco's death are all too common: a young person of color is arrested on a low-level charge; cash bail is required; and time is spent in solitary confinement. This system ruins lives, and we must change it.

I am proud that the Council is acting to move forward with this legislation, and I thank Speaker Johnson and Chair Powers for their leadership. I am also grateful to the advocates and service providers who testified and worked with me to make sure we got this legislation right.

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