

**Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice
New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice
Oversight - Examining Recommendations from the Independent Rikers Commission's
Blueprint to Close Rikers**

April 16, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Nurse, and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice. Thank you for the invitation to speak today. I'm Deanna Logan, Director of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ). Joining me today are colleagues from the Department of Correction (DOC), Chelsea Chard, Senior Advisor for Legislative Affairs and Policy and Alexandria Maldonado, Assistant Commissioner for Strategic Initiatives; the Department of Design & Construction (DDC), Deputy Commissioner Eduardo Del Valle; and Correctional Health Services (CHS), Jeanette Merrill, AVP of Communications and External Affairs. We represent partner agencies working tirelessly to achieve our administration's commitment to close Rikers Island.

MOCJ employs innovative strategies grounded in data as we collaborate with multiple stakeholders to deploy solutions that address our city's public safety challenges. Thank you for prioritizing our shared goal of replacing Rikers Island with a network of smaller, borough-based jails that are aimed to better serve all New Yorkers. To be clear, we want to do it quickly; we want to do it efficiently; we want to do it thoughtfully; and we want to do it in a way that protects people in custody, correctional staff, and the neighborhoods we all call home.

When we started this initiative together several years ago, we knew it would be hard work. We sit before you today to tell you – we are doing that hard work. Fundamentally, closing Rikers comes down to three commitments: 1) Building state-of-the-art safe and humane jails; 2) Eliminating unnecessary incarceration at the Department of Correction; and 3) Supporting reentry strategies to end recidivism. The city recognizes it must meet these three vital commitments before Rikers

Island can close. We understand the challenge, and we are determined to meet it. Thank you for the opportunity to share more about the work that supports these goals.

This project's success depends on the construction of state-of-the-art jail facilities that support the safety and well-being of people in custody, CHS Staff, correction officers, and DOC staff who will be the ones to experience the facility every day. These new facilities will be safer, modern, and — most importantly — closer to families and communities.

This is not just about buildings; it's about fundamentally transforming how we approach incarceration in our city. These borough-based jails will allow for more individualized care, better access to support services, and subsequently foster a more successful re-entry, which will ultimately improve lives.

As the Lippman report acknowledged, DDC's utilization of design-build strategies is maximizing efficiency and saving time, by allowing for site prep and foundation work *prior* to design completion. The design-build teams meet daily with their partners across the city to find new efficiencies and tackle challenges that arise, and later this Spring, they will issue a Notice to Proceed for the creation of our fourth and final new jail. DDC also initiated robust community engagement in partnership with DOC, which will continue for the duration of this program. It is important outreach that guides both what our buildings will look like, and how we get there. The city is making significant investments in infrastructure, as well, which continue to bring us closer to realizing this endeavor's capital needs. We know construction is a disruption, but we are all working to balance speed, safety, adverse impacts on neighborhoods, and our fiscal responsibility to taxpayers.

The report underscores the importance of the Outposted Therapeutic Housing Units initiative, which will create secure, clinical units within three NYC Health + Hospitals facilities for people in DOC custody who

have serious medical and/or mental health conditions and would benefit from better access to hospital services and resources. In March 2024, Mayor Adams directed the City to move forward with all three sites in order to best serve the most clinically vulnerable people in custody. The Administration added \$160 million in the FY25 September Capital Plan and \$32 million in the FY26 Preliminary Capital Plan for the construction of these three critically important units. We invested \$910 million in total for capital construction.

We appreciate the Commission's transparency and candor in acknowledging there is no way for Rikers to close by 2027. The original expectations were predicated on a pre-pandemic timeline, and for numerous reasons, they are unattainable today. However, this reality does not change our commitment to the mission, or how fast we're working to get there.

Public safety of all New Yorkers is the goal in our administration's approach to addressing the concerns on Rikers, including efforts and investments to meaningfully reduce the number of people who are incarcerated. We don't want anyone to spend one day more in jail than necessary. We are grateful to Judge Lippman and the Commission for acknowledging the Administration's hard work, and for recognizing that we are already making substantial progress in our goal to reduce the Rikers population through programs like supervised release, re-entry, and alternatives to incarceration, so that jail is not the only option to maintain public safety. We agree with the Commission's assessment that reducing delays across the criminal justice system is key to reducing the jail population. MOCJ is working with our partners in the court system, as well as defenders and district attorneys to speed case processing times to reduce the population on Rikers. The Office of Court Administration (OCA) recently implemented a pilot in Brooklyn that we understand is showing promising early results. OCA plans to implement the new process in courts citywide in the next year.

The city continues to invest in services and programs that offer alternatives to incarceration. We know that we can stop cycles of violence and improve the odds of successful community reintegration by making evidence-based investments in people.

We are working hard to ensure that fewer and fewer people are ever sent or return to jail. Our Supervised Release (SRP) and Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) programs successfully divert *tens of thousands* of individuals from Rikers every year. The individual assessments and supports help people navigate the criminal legal system and improve both their compliance and long-term outcomes.

Research and data are critical to developing the kinds of interventions that will allow people with higher needs and with higher risk of recidivism to remain in community either as they await case resolution, or after resolution of a criminal case. Research on this population allowed MOCJ to develop and implement an “intense case management” pilot – a rigorous supervision model with lower caseloads and higher-levels of voluntary engagement. Early results demonstrate success in improving compliance for individuals most at-risk of failing pretrial supervision.

In addition, the Jail Population Review mandated by LL 75/2023 has helped MOCJ’s research team uncover trends and specific groups that support our understanding of who is on Rikers Island, for how long, and how we can prevent entry or their return to incarceration.

While DOC’s jurisdiction to reduce the jail population is limited to the city-sentenced population pursuant to the State Correction Law, the Department repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to reducing the population consistent with public safety. Commissioner Maginley-Liddie exercises her authority pursuant to Correction Law Article 6A by carefully reviewing the conviction, criminal history, and conduct in custody of individuals sentenced to incarceration on Rikers. For each participant, DOC works with nonprofit partners to develop customized

transition plans that include stable housing and employment. In this way, DOC provides opportunities for city-sentenced individuals to finish their sentence in the community, allowing for a more seamless transition.

Ending the cycle of recidivism is crucial to reducing the jail population. As part of our efforts to support individuals *after* incarceration, MOCJ contracts with community-based providers for in-custody discharge planning, in-community re-entry services, job training and employment.

For every person in DOC custody, CHS provides core re-entry services – including Medicaid screening and application assistance – prior to discharge and provides individualized discharge plans for patients who have significant clinical needs, including all patients receiving mental health treatment. Patients who have serious mental illness are offered additional services, including case management services.

Housing is a key component of a successful transition from incarceration to community. MOCJ provides transitional housing, with the goal of connection to permanent housing. For so many of our justice-involved individuals, stability translates to safety – both for them, and their communities. MOCJ research found New Yorkers whose previously unmet housing needs are satisfied, are over 30% less likely to commit a felony than someone who returns to the community from jail without housing support.

As a part of this hearing Council introduced several bills. MOCJ and our partners in the administration, including our sister agencies impacted, are reviewing the bills. We look forward to discussing the bills and understanding more about the goals of the bills and how we can work together to achieve those objectives.

We invest in people. And those investments pay dividends through the safety and well-being of all New Yorkers. The Lippman Commission Report acknowledges what the Administration has been saying all along – Rikers cannot close by 2027. Therefore, we are calling on the Council

to work with the Administration to amend the law to provide a realistic and obtainable timeline.

In addition, given that we agree closure of Rikers is not achievable by 2027, we collectively have a duty to ensure continued habitable facilities and adequate services for both staff and people in DOC's care. This cannot be done without an amendment to the law by Council, which will unlock emergency capital funds that can be used for this critical purpose. Failure to do so will jeopardize all those that must remain on Rikers Island until we can safely close it.

The continued partnership of the courts, Office of the District Attorneys, Offices of Public Defenders, and state government is also vital. We are moving in the right direction on case processing, but every person in these organizations has a role to play, and each one of them can help push this mission forward.

Let me reiterate: We will close Rikers Island. This is tough work – but we are making progress every day. We will get to the finish line by working together thoughtfully, and by continuing to commit to evidence-based solutions that are already making a difference – Alternatives to Incarceration; Supervised Release; Transitional Housing – and with *renewed* commitments from all our partners at the state, the Courts, the Offices of the District Attorneys and the Offices of the Public Defenders. We all want the same result -- a justice system that is fair; jails that are humane; and a New York that's safe for everyone. Thank you for your continued partnership in this pursuit.



Testimony of Craig Retchless, Deputy Commissioner, Office of Supportive and Affordable Housing and Services, New York City Human Services Administration

**Before the New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice
Oversight - Examining Recommendations from the Independent Rikers Commission's
Blueprint to Close Rikers
and
Introduction 1100**

April 16, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Nurse and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice. My name is Craig Retchless and I serve as Deputy Commissioner for the Office of Supportive and Affordable Housing and Services (OSAHS) within the Human Services Administration (HRA). Thank you for holding today's hearing on "Examining Recommendations from the Independent Rikers Commission's Blueprint to Close Rikers." Today, I will testify on Introduction 1100, which would expand supportive housing eligibility for justice involved persons.

Supportive Housing Overview

Supportive Housing provides permanent affordable housing for individuals and families who have experienced long-term homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness. Supportive housing provides a continuum of integrated services to assist vulnerable individuals and families transitioning from homelessness, especially those with severe mental illness and substance use disorders. Proven results show that supportive housing fosters greater stability, self-sufficiency, and overall improved health and mental health. Approximately, 94% of supportive housing units are occupied by long-term tenants.

The Office of Supportive and Affordable Housing and Services (OSAHS) is focused on developing permanent housing solutions for individuals and families who have experienced homelessness. OSAHS works closely with other divisions of HRA, partner agencies, and not-for-profit service providers to develop new housing programs and to refer applicants to housing so those we serve can achieve their maximum functional capacity in a safe supportive environment. OSAHS is the coordinating entity for New York City's 15/15 Supportive Housing initiative, working closely with the Department of Health and Mental Health (DOHMH) and Housing Preservation and Development (HPD).

Introduction 1100

Introduction 1100 would require the Department of Social Services to provide eligibility for single adults or adult families and families with children where the head of household has a severe mental illness (SMI), substance use disorder (SUD), or both, is homeless or at risk of homelessness, and has had justice system involvement in the last 12 months in any existing supportive housing program administered and wholly funded by the city, otherwise known as NYC 15/15.

The bill, as it is currently written, presents significant concerns. This overly broad criteria would create even more demand for limited available units essential to stabilizing homeless individuals on the streets or in shelter who meet the experience chronic homelessness as defined by HUD and have limited options for housing security. NYC, through a government and community led stakeholder group, adopted the HUD definition for the NYC 15/15 program to focus on the most vulnerable of the homeless population, as research suggests this targeting helps communities solve chronic homelessness. At the same time, many of the applicants for supportive housing from carceral settings are eligible under supportive housing initiatives other than NYC 15/15. Given the existing resources for this population, DSS feels advancing with this legislation as written will likely overwhelm the referral system and negatively impact those most in need of these supportive housing resources.

In an effort to address the housing challenges faced by individuals experiencing housing insecurity as well as stays in both the criminal justice and hospital systems, DSS recently issued an addendum to the NYC 15/15 RFP to expand supportive housing eligibility to single adults with jail or hospital stays who otherwise would not qualify under the HUD “chronic homelessness” requirement. The new criteria targets individuals with a history of two or more incarcerations or hospitalizations and 180 days of homelessness within the last four years. The new eligibility criteria will take effect on May 5th, 2025.

Conclusion

DSS/HRA/DHS will continue to work with stakeholders to improve the mechanisms for referral and placement for those SMI/SUD individuals being discharged from jail to homelessness. Although we cannot support this bill in its current state, we look forward to working with the Council and the bill sponsor to address the agency’s concerns. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.

**Oral Testimony of Brianna Seid
Counsel, Justice Program
Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law¹**

**Before the New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice
April 16, 2025**

Good morning, Chair Nurse and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice.

My name is Brianna Seid, I'm an attorney working as counsel in the Justice Program at the Brennan Center for Justice. The Brennan Center is a law and public policy organization, and the Justice Program focuses on reducing the size and scope of mass incarceration and its related harms. We produce reports and analyses based on research and data, advocate for innovative policy solutions to address these harms.

As part of our focus on reducing the detrimental social and economic impacts of incarceration, we are asking the New York City Council to pass Resolution 371, urging lawmakers in Albany to pass, and the Governor to sign, the Reentry Assistance Bill.

Fifty years ago, researchers concluded that New York's gate money – the resources provided to people leaving prison – was inadequate to meet the needs of New Yorkers returning to their community, today it is woefully insufficient.²

New Yorkers returning to their communities after being incarcerated face a difficult and arduous task, typically returning home without savings or other financial resources.³ The collateral consequences of a criminal conviction also prevent people from accessing essential resources that help with reentry – folks not only struggle to secure employment, housing, and access to education, but also basic necessities like clothing and personal hygiene products, essentials when you're trying to secure a job.⁴ Research by the Brennan Center has found that formerly incarcerated Americans will lose around half of their earning potential, amounting to over \$55 billion in lost earnings annually with persistent racial disparities.⁵ By directly alleviating the income scarcity that all too often creates a no-win situation for returning New Yorkers, this bill can help avoid the risk of re-incarceration which is costly for all New Yorkers.

The Reentry Assistance Bill would address the struggles faced by people returning from prison head-on by providing stipends of \$425 each month for up to six months, so long as they remain compliant with

¹ The opinions expressed in this testimony are only those of the Brennan Center and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NYU School of Law.

² Peter H. Rossi, Richard A. Berk, and Kenneth J. Lenihan, *Money, Work, and Crime: Some Experimental Results*, New York: Academic Press, 1980, 26-28.

³ Terry-Ann Craigie, Ames Grawert, and Cameron Kimble, *Conviction, Imprisonment, and Lost Earnings: How Involvement with the Criminal Justice System Deepens Inequality*, Brennan Center for Justice, 2020, 6, https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/EconomicImpactReport_pdf.pdf

⁴ Simon G. Kolbeck, Paul E. Bellair, Steven Lopez, *Race, work history, and the employment recidivism relationship*, *Criminology*, 2022, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/1745-9125.12317>.

⁵ Craigie et al., *Conviction, Imprisonment, and Lost Earnings*, 7.

conditions of their release.⁶ The total amount would not exceed \$2,550 and would be adjusted annually for inflation.⁷ Fully funding this bill requires less than 1% of DOCCS's general fund, less than 5% of DOCCS's over \$3 billion budget is spent on reentry services and programs currently.⁸ New York State spends an average of \$115,000 per year on average to incarcerate just one person in a state prison.⁹ For 1/40th the cost of a single year of imprisonment, New York can invest in folks returning to the community, increasing public safety and reducing recidivism.

Evaluations of programs that provide cash-assistance to people leaving prison, like the Center for Employment Opportunities' assessment of the Returning Citizen Stimulus, have found that folks who receive cash assistance when leaving prison use the money to cover these costs.¹⁰ Access to cash-assistance has been associated with a decline in violent crime arrest rates and the ability to secure and maintain employment. Short-term support has also been found to sharply reduce recidivism, particularly for women.¹¹

In closing, we ask this committee to pass Resolution 371 to call on the state legislature to pass the Reentry Assistance Bill.

By investing in people returning to the community, this bill provides a rare chance to reduce recidivism and enhance public safety, while also saving New York money over the long term by reducing the risk of costly re-incarceration. By providing financial assistance to those leaving prison, this bill helps bridge the gap between incarceration and successful reintegration into the community. New York must prioritize supporting members of the community who are returning home from incarceration — it cannot afford to neglect their needs any longer.

I want to thank Councilmember Hudson for authoring this resolution which makes clear to Albany that NYC wants to prioritize a criminal justice system that improves outcomes and make communities safer.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

See attached annex: The Reentry Assistance Bill Can Build a Safer New York and Save Money, Brennan Center for Justice

⁶ S. 6222, 2025-2026 Sess. (N.Y. 2025), <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/S6222>; A. 6990, 2025-2026 Sess. (N.Y. 2025), <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/A6990>.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ S. 8300/A. 8800, 2024-2025 Sess. (N.Y. 2024), Department of Corrections and Community Supervision State Operations, 81, <http://public.leginfo.state.ny.us/budssrch.cgi?NVBUO>.

⁹ Vera Institute of Justice, *The Cost of Incarceration in New York State*, 2021, https://vera-institute.files.svdcn.com/production/inline-downloads/new-york-state-counties-summary_2021-01-15-204135.pdf.

¹⁰ Ivonne Garcia et al., *Paving the Way Home: An Evaluation of the Returning Citizens Stimulus Program*, MDRC, 2021, <https://www.ceoworks.org/assets/downloads/RCS-Evaluation-Report.pdf>.

¹¹ See Caroline Palmer, David C. Phillips, James X. Sullivan, *Does emergency financial assistance reduce crime?*, *Journal of Public Economics*, 2018, 35-51, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2018.10.012>; Kristy Holtfreter, Michael D. Reisig, Merry Morash, *Poverty, State Capital, and Recidivism Among Women Offenders*, *Criminology & Public Policy*, 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2004.tb00035.x>; Garcia et al., *Paving the Way Home*.

The Reentry Assistance Bill Can Build a Safer New York and Save Money

The bill would reduce recidivism, enhance public safety, and save New York money.

APRIL 09, 2025

Currently, New Yorkers returning to the community after a period of incarceration receive residuals of their commissary accounts, not to exceed \$200 to facilitate their transition. Together, the resources provided to people leaving prison are commonly referred to as [gate money](#); which is meant to help them cover immediate expenses such as transportation or basic necessities as they transition back into their community. Fifty years ago, New York's gate money was [found to be inadequate](#) to serve this purpose; today it is woefully insufficient.

The Brennan Center supports The Reentry Assistance Bill ([S. 6222/A. 6990](#)) aimed at increasing the amount of money people are provided when leaving prison through a new reentry fund. By providing financial assistance to those leaving prison, this bill helps bridge the gap between incarceration and successful reintegration into the community. New York must prioritize supporting members of the community who are returning from incarceration — it cannot afford to neglect their needs any longer.

For the roughly [157,047 men and 31,470 women released from prisons and jails](#) in New York each year, reentry and reintegration into the community can be a difficult and arduous task. Formerly incarcerated people typically return home [without savings or other financial resources](#), making that transition all the more difficult. The collateral consequences of a criminal conviction prevent people from accessing essential resources or to help with successful reentry. For example, those leaving prison struggle to secure [employment, housing](#), and access to [higher education](#). Even those who do successfully find employment [typically earn around half](#) of what their never-incarcerated peers make annually.

Recently, some efforts to supplement what the New York provides those leaving prison produced encouraging results. Most notably, in April of 2020, the Center for Employment Opportunities implemented the [Returning Citizen Stimulus \(RCS\)](#) program to assist people released from incarceration during the Covid-19 pandemic

successfully reintegrate into their communities. The center has distributed cash assistance to nearly [2,000 New Yorkers](#) through that stimulus program, and the [results have been profound](#). An [evaluation of the program](#) found that most recipients used the money to cover the cost of food, housing, transportation and other essential personal care expenses. Evaluations of cash-assistance in other contexts have had promising results. Access to cash-assistance has been associated with a [decline in violent crime arrest rates](#) and short-term support also [sharply reduces recidivism](#) among women. Participants in one cash assistance program for people leaving prison also [reported](#) that cash assistance helped them find and maintain employment.

The Reentry Assistance Bill would address the struggles faced by people returning from prison or jail head-on by providing stipends of [\\$425 each month for up to six](#)

[months](#), so long as they remain compliant with conditions of their release. The total amount would not exceed \$2,550 and would be adjusted annually for inflation. To pay for this program, lawmakers are asking for \$25 million from the state general fund. For comparison, [New York spends an average of \\$115,000 per year](#) to incarcerate just one person in state prison, and the entire annual operating budget for the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision in 2024 was [over \\$3 billion](#). By investing in people returning to the community, there is the possibility of [substantial economic benefits for taxpayers](#) as fewer individuals who were previously incarcerated are likely to return to prison post-release.

The Reentry Assistance Bill gives us a rare chance to reduce recidivism and enhance public safety while also saving New York money. We urge lawmakers to seize this opportunity that will benefit all New Yorkers.



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**Center for Justice Innovation
New York City Council
Committee on Criminal Justice
April 16, 2025**

Good afternoon Chair Nurse and esteemed members of the Committee on Criminal Justice. My name is Shlomit Levy and I serve as the Project Director of the Center for Justice Innovation's Brooklyn Felony Diversion programs, including Brooklyn Mental Health Court and Brooklyn Felony Alternatives to Incarceration. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

The Center strongly supports the efforts of the Independent Rikers Commission to identify a plan to proceed with the closure of the Rikers Island jail complex. As a member of the Commission, we concur with their urgent call to do this as soon as possible.

A major hurdle cited by the Commission in the timeline to closing Rikers is the bloated population size that currently exceeds the capacity of the borough-based jail system. The current jail population surpasses 6,800 people. Fifty-seven percent of this population suffers from mental illness, including 1,400 people with serious mental illness, making the jail the second largest psychiatric facility in the country.¹

Recognizing this, the Center supports the Commission in advocating for an approach that prioritizes meeting the mental health and addiction treatment needs of the people incarcerated there. By connecting individuals with the resources necessary to live safely and successfully in community, we can curtail recidivism and create safer communities, ultimately relying less on carceral responses to crime.

The Center has long advocated for a community-based approach to public safety, focused on connecting young people and adults to resources like mental health counseling, addiction treatment, housing and employment support and more. Our programs work to address the underlying conditions that result in justice system involvement with the ultimate goal of creating safer communities.

For more than 30 years, we have partnered with courts in New York, New Jersey, and across the country to develop evidence-based alternatives that promote safety, accountability, and better outcomes for both participants and their communities. Our teams work throughout all

¹ Independent Rikers Commission. (2025, March). *A Path Forward: The Blueprint to Close Rikers*. MoreJustNYC.com.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b6de4731aef1de914f43628/t/67dd7c6d4e5dca1fa86db6d8/1742568562268/Independent+Rikers+Commission+Blueprint+to+Close+Rikers+Island+March+2025.pdf>

stages of involvement with the criminal legal system, using community level engagement and working within systems to connect people to community-based services that meet their underlying needs and reduce the likelihood of future harm.

Some of our programs, like Project Reset, focus on building pathways out of the justice system and into community-based care for people charged with low-level crimes, often before they step foot in court. Others, like the Brooklyn Mental Health Court and Manhattan Justice Opportunities, offer safe, meaningful alternatives to jail and prison for people dealing with more complex needs.

We work with the court, local prosecutors, defense attorneys and community-based service providers to address an array of participant needs, including complex mental health, substance use, employment, and housing needs. Clinicians and other onsite staff conduct independent assessments; prepare recommendations for programming and supervision; provide referrals to community-based providers; offer rigorous ongoing case management, supervision, and compliance monitoring; and pilot new services. Ultimately, we work to end the cycle of harm, reduce the use of prison and jail, decrease recidivism and achieve lasting public safety and community wellness

The data from our Alternative to Incarceration (ATI) programming shows that the City's collective desires to produce safer communities and decrease incarceration are not at odds with each other. Our programs boast high levels of compliance as well as meaningful impacts on recidivism. In 2024, 82 percent of our Felony ATI participants across the Center completed their programming successfully. Since inception, 75 percent of successful participants in the Center's Manhattan Justice Opportunities Felony ATI program graduated with no criminal record. 95 percent were able to avoid a felony conviction.²

At Brooklyn Mental Health Court, which specifically serves those with serious mental illness, over 1,400 participants have received treatment, satisfied program requirements, and graduated, all outside of the carceral setting. Active participants had a 76 percent compliance rate, along with a statistically significant reduction in re-arrests for active participants; and a 17 percent reduction in likelihood of reconviction versus a comparison group.³ Additionally, the Court-Involved Youth Mental Health initiative of Brooklyn Mental Health Court provides specialized support to youth ages 18 to 24, who have unique social and cognitive needs and represent a growing percentage of the cases we serve. Since 2017, more than 191 youth in this age range have been served by Brooklyn Mental Health Court.⁴

Our Alternatives to Incarceration programming boasts similar results for lower level crimes. Our misdemeanor ATIs feature the same rigorous monitoring and case management in addition to tailored referrals to services. The Center also manages Project Reset, which offers people a meaningful path out of the legal system before they even appear in court. Participants complete community-based programming, based on restorative justice principles, avoiding the

² Center for Justice Innovation. (2025). Justice Center Application and Reset referral database. [Data file].

³ Center for Justice Innovation. (2025). Brooklyn Mental Health Court Database. [Data file].

⁴ Ibid.

negative impacts to housing, employment, and education that a traditional court process or brief period of incarceration could have.

From 2015 through 2024, Project Reset has helped more than 10,000 cases avoid court and the consequences of a criminal record, and 5,500 cases last year alone. This figure includes our traditional pre-arraignment model of Project Reset, as well as our same-day at-arraignment Rapid Reset programming. This Rapid Reset model has become increasingly popular, as clients are not always able to be reached prior to their appearance in court. Despite this, with the Rapid Reset model clients can still earn a “decline to prosecute” by completing programming, simply at-arraignment rather than before.

As of 2024, the program has a 96 percent attendance rate of those scheduled.⁵ An evaluation of 16- and 17-year-old Project Reset participants in Manhattan found they were significantly less likely than defendants in a comparison group to be convicted of a new crime within one year. It also documented improved case processing times and case outcomes, as well as positive perceptions of the program. More than 95 percent of participants said they had made the right decision by entering the program and that they would recommend Project Reset to someone in a similar situation.⁶

Additionally, the Center runs Supervised Release, an Alternative-to-Detention program in Brooklyn and Staten Island. Decreasing pre-trial detention is an important step in the effort to shrink the number of people incarcerated in NYC. The supervised release model employs social workers and case managers who check in regularly with supervised release participants to not only help plan for upcoming court dates and address needs and barriers to court attendance, but also to connect them to community-based resources and services that can provide lasting support beyond the duration of a court case.

An independent evaluation found that Supervised Release is as effective as cash bail at preventing failure to appear in court without recourse to the documented harms of incarceration.⁷ In 2020, a citywide measure showed that since 2016, 87 percent of participants never missed a single court date while enrolled in Supervised Release. Court attendance remains high following major bail reforms in January 2020 which made all cases eligible for the program, with approximately 90 percent of scheduled court dates attended.⁸

The Center also supports the Commission’s recommendation to expand the 6-A Work Release Program to provide robust re-entry supervision and support for people serving city sentences of less than a year. The Center co-ran the 6-A program during the COVID pandemic, releasing nearly 300 people who had been sentenced to jail into a supervised release program.

⁵ Center for Justice Innovation. (2025). Justice Center Application and Reset referral database. [Data file].

⁶ Cadoff, B. & K. Dalve (2019, January). *Project Reset: An Evaluation of a Pre-Arraignment Diversion Program in New York City*. New York, NY: Center for Justice Innovation.
<https://www.innovatingjustice.org/publications/projectreset-evaluation>

⁷ Bloom, H., C. Redcross & M. Skemer (2020, September). *Pursuing Pretrial Justice Through an Alternative to Bail: Findings from an Evaluation of New York City’s Supervised Release Program*. New York, NY: MDRC.
<https://www.mdrc.org/work/publications/pursuing-pretrial-justice-through-alternative-bail>

⁸ Center for Justice Innovation, New York City Criminal Justice Agency & CASES. (2021, October). *Supervised Release: A Proven Alternative to Bail*. New York, NY.
<https://www.innovatingjustice.org/publications/supervised-release-five-years-later>

The evidence indicates that operating the 6-A program on this sizable scale – even on an emergency basis with all the constraints of COVID – did not jeopardize public safety. After two years, researchers found no significant difference in overall re-arrest, felony re-arrest, or violent felony re-arrest rates between 6-A participants released during the pandemic and a similarly situated comparison group sentenced to jail in 2018.⁹

We recommend that the Council utilizes these programs to reduce the burden on the current jail population, facilitating the transition to the borough-based jail system. These programs hold people accountable for their actions while promoting healing and strengthening public trust in the justice system. As evidenced by the reduction in re-arrests and convictions, these programs solve the problems that result in justice system involvement and benefit individuals and communities for years to come. Just one of our programs, Manhattan Justice Opportunities Felony ATI program, has prevented at least 700 collective years of incarceration with 291 successful graduates.¹⁰ We urge Council to remain steadfast in their commitment to closing Rikers and welcome the opportunity to be a partner on this mission.

⁹ Wada, C. & Pooler, T., Community Supervision as a Jail Reduction Strategy: Key Findings from an Impact Evaluation of the NYC Early Release Program (forthcoming in 2025).

¹⁰ Center for Justice Innovation. (2025). Justice Center Application and Reset referral database. [Data file].



**Testimony before the New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice
FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing, March 7, 2025**

Chair Nurse and Committee Members:

Since 1995, Children's Rights has been a national advocate for youth in state systems. We are also a member of the New York City Jails Action Coalition. Our experience with adolescents and young adults in foster care and juvenile legal systems often brings us into contact with young adult and youth corrections policy, as our clients are disproportionately represented in young adult and juvenile correction facilities. We advocate on behalf of young adults, 18- to 21-years old, incarcerated on Rikers Island.

We cannot incarcerate our way to public health and safety. We must invest in our communities, not continue to throw money at the humanitarian disaster that is Rikers Island. We urge this Committee and the Council to cut the Department of Correction budget and redistribute funding to programs that actually work to improve public safety. We also urge you to reverse the cuts to the Board of Correction to provide the resources for meaningful oversight of the City's jails.

New York City operates both the most excessively-funded and over-staffed jail system in the country—with the worst results. The City now spends over \$500,000 per incarcerated person per year.¹ It runs the only jail system among the nation's 50 largest cities that has more officers than people in custody.² Despite the enormous sums poured into the City's jails, however, countless reports show that detainees are subjected to some of the most dangerous, degrading, and inhumane conditions in the country. We need look no further than the *Nunez* monitor's regular reports and the February 28, 2024 report filed in *Benjamin v. Molina* detailing vermin infestation and sanitary violations on Rikers.³ Serving time on Rikers can also be a death sentence: since

¹ <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/ensuring-timely-trials/>. The most recent available data show that more than 78% of incarcerated persons on Rikers are there pre-trial, more than half have mental health conditions, and over 84% are people of color. <https://greaterjusticenyc.vera.org/nycjail/> Hundreds of people languish on Rikers every day simply because they are homeless.

<https://nysfocus.com/2022/01/03/he-was-homeless-so-the-judge-kept-him-at-rikers/>.

² [DOC Fact Sheet: Staffing and Efforts to Improve Conditions](https://vera-institute.files.svdcdn.com/production/downloads/publications/a-look-inside-the-new-york-city-correction-budget.pdf); <https://vera-institute.files.svdcdn.com/production/downloads/publications/a-look-inside-the-new-york-city-correction-budget.pdf>.

³ <https://tillidgroup.com/projects/nunez-monitorship/>; <https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/new-rikers-island-report-reveals-graphic-details-about-unsanitary-conditions-fire-safety-and-ventilation-systems/>; [https://ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/politics/2024/01/11/detainees-request-clean-laundry--report-unsanitary-conditions-on-rikers#:~:text=%22They%20don%27t%20have%20soap,%2C%20to%20wash%20their%20clothes.%22](https://ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/politics/2024/01/11/detainees-request-clean-laundry--report-unsanitary-conditions-on-rikers#:~:text=%22They%20don%27t%20have%20soap,%2C%20to%20wash%20their%20clothes.%22;); see also <https://centerforjustice.columbia.edu/news/new-report-solitary-many-other-names-report-persistent-and-pervasive-use-solitary-confinement>.

Mayor Adams took office, 35 incarcerated people have lost their lives while in Department custody.⁴

Children’s Rights urges you to include in the Council’s priorities the following:

- At least an additional \$39.8M to meet housing and mental health needs, and to fulfill commitments in the Close Rikers plan, including the following funding for specific programs:
 - \$4.8 million more in annual funding for Justice Involved Supportive Housing (JISH), and reissue the RFP for 380 new units with service funding levels in line with those of similar supportive housing programs. This will enable the City to deliver on the Close Rikers Points of Agreement to expand JISH to 500 units.
 - \$22 million more to create 15 more Intensive Mobile Treatment teams. The waitlist to access this evidence-based program is over 400 people.
 - \$7 million more to create more Forensic Assertive Community Treatment teams and cut the long wait times (average of six to 12 months) to access this service.
 - \$6 million more to open four new crisis respite centers, in compliance with Local Law 118-2023.
- Full restoration of cuts to the Office of Criminal Justice for alternatives to incarceration (ATIs) (\$3.8 million) and re-entry (\$8 million) programs. The budget should also go further, and increase discretionary funding for ATIs by \$2.4 million to support the scaling of ATIs citywide.
- Full restoration of cuts to the Board of Correction and increase its headcount to at least 1% of the number of people in DOC custody.⁵ The preliminary budget proposes \$210,000 in cuts and five fewer staff positions at BOC, when more oversight, not less, of the jails on Rikers is sorely needed.
 - Establishing a minimum budget linked to the number of people in custody would add 37 BOC staff positions (versus the preliminary budget), but would add only \$4.5M to the overall expense budget.

If the City eliminated the more than 1,100 current vacant positions for uniformed correction officers, New York City could save almost \$150 million next year *alone* to reinvest in the programs and services listed above—programs that create real community safety and well-being.⁶

Finally, the investments we recommend will help the City close Rikers by August 31, 2027 in accordance with the law. We call on the Council to ensure our communities have adequate supportive and affordable housing, mental health care, and other critical services *before* New

⁴ <https://www.vera.org/news/nyc-jail-deaths>; the most recent person to die in DOC custody was Terrence Moore on February 24, 2025.

⁵ The FY2026 projected budget allocates \$3.6 million to BOC, for 30 staff; 67 staff would constitute less than 1% of the current jail population (6,800 people).

⁶ <https://vera-institute.files.svcdcn.com/production/downloads/publications/a-look-inside-the-new-york-city-correction-budget.pdf>.

Yorkers interact with the criminal legal system. This is especially critical for our children and youth. Evidence shows that incarceration reduces youth's success in education and employment, and also leads to lasting damage to their health and well-being.⁷ Evidence also shows that alternatives to incarceration lead to better outcomes for youth and adolescents, all while costing far less than incarceration.⁸ Underfunding alternatives to confinement and re-entry services makes no sense morally, ethically, or fiscally.

Negotiating these essential changes to the proposed budget provides an opportunity for the Council to move the City in the right direction, while also rightsizing the expenditure of taxpayer dollars. Instead of allocating \$2.87 billion to the Department of Correction as the Mayor has proposed,⁹ the Council should negotiate a fair, just, and reasonable budget that serves all New Yorkers, including young adults and adults on Rikers, and expedites closure of the Island.

Especially in the face of the federal government's rampage against the most vulnerable among us, we look to the City Council to do right by all New Yorkers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Sincerely,



Daniele Gerard
Senior Staff Attorney
dgerard@childrensrights.org

⁷ <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/why-youth-incarceration-fails-an-updated-review-of-the-evidence/>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ <https://vera-institute.files.svcdn.com/production/downloads/publications/A-Look-Inside-the-New-York-City-Fiscal-Year-2026-Preliminary-Budget.pdf>.



Testimony of

Coalition for the Homeless

before the Committee on Criminal Justice
of the New York City Council

on

Oversight – Examining Recommendations from the Independent Rikers
Commission's Blueprint to Close Rikers

submitted by

Alison Wilkey, Esq.
Director of Government Affairs and Strategic Campaigns
The Coalition for the Homeless

April 16, 2025

The Coalition for the Homeless (“Coalition”) is the court- and City-appointed independent monitor of the DHS shelter system and counsel in the historic *Callahan*, *Eldredge*, and *Boston* cases that created the right to shelter in NYC. We are actively engaged in assisting and defending the rights of homeless New Yorkers advocating for the resources needed to end mass homelessness by ensuring access to permanent housing. Our Keys Program supports single adults with mental illness and other disabilities, who are too often overlooked or ignored, helping them secure safe and stable housing. We work collaboratively with our clients through the lengthy and complicated process of applying for and locating placements in permanent supportive housing. This empowers them to be able to live with the same dignity that every human being deserves.

Jail is Not a Home: Introduction 1100-2024

Introduction 1100-2024 would remove the barriers that prevent thousands of people from accessing supportive housing after incarceration. NYC 15/15, the city’s primary supportive housing program, requires applicants to meet the federal definition of being chronically homeless, which mandates that an individual qualify as homeless for 12 or more months in the past 3 years, or have 4 or more separate episodes of homelessness that total 12 or more months in the past 3 years. However, the rule excludes any jail or prison stay longer than 90 days from the homelessness time calculation. This effectively precludes most people with serious mental illness exiting jails and prison from accessing supportive housing upon release.

NYC 15/15 was launched in 2015 to create 15,000 units of supportive housing over 15 years for individuals with serious mental illness and/or substance use disorder who also have a history of homelessness. The program adopted the federal chronic homeless eligibility described above even though it is not required; NYC 15/15 is entirely City-funded, and it need not follow the federal criteria. This unnecessary rule excludes thousands of individuals with serious mental illness and/or substance use disorders exiting jails and prisons from accessing supportive housing, leaving them with nowhere to sleep but on the streets and in shelters. For most homeless people leaving jail who have a mental illness or substance use disorder, NYC 15/15 is the only supportive housing option. New York City’s only dedicated supportive housing program for justice-involved individuals, Justice Involved Supportive Housing (JISH), remains underfunded and incomplete. As part of the plan to close Rikers Island, the City committed to funding 500 JISH units, yet only 120 have been opened.¹ This is entirely insufficient to meet the need.

The Independent Budget Office reported that 33% of people admitted to NYC jails in 2023 were homeless prior to their jail stays.² The average length of time in custody for people detained

¹ “A Path Forward: The Blueprint to Close Rikers.” (March 2025). Independent Rikers Commission. https://bit.ly/Independent_Rikers_Commission_Blueprint_to_Close_Rikers.

² *In Custody: Length of Stay and Population Demographics at NYC Jails, 2014–2023*. (2023). New York City Independent Budget Office. <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/in-custody-length-of-stay-and-population-demographics-at-nyc-jails-2014-2023-march-2024.html>.

pretrial at Rikers is 269 days, and it is 98 days for the entire population, as of February 2024.³ Thus, most people who are homeless when they enter Rikers do not qualify for supportive housing upon release because the City is choosing to exclude jail and prison stays when it calculates the length of a person's homelessness. In addition, every year since 2015, between 41 and 54 percent of people returning to New York City from state prisons were discharged directly into city shelters.⁴ As a result, too many people with serious mental illness are released from jails and prisons directly to shelters or the streets – with little or no services to meet their needs.

By passing Introduction 1100-2024, an estimated 2,600 people would be eligible for supportive housing upon release.⁵ The bill ensures that City-funded supportive housing programs include individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, have had justice system involvement in the past 12 months, and have a diagnosed serious mental illness and/or substance use disorder. This change would ease the burden on shelters, support the City's commitment to closing Rikers by 2027, and reduce incarceration rates – ultimately, it would make New York City safer.

Supportive housing is an evidenced-based and cost-effective way to reduce jail, hospital, and shelter stays for homeless people with serious mental illness. New York City's FUSE Pilot Program provided supportive housing for individuals with frequent jail and shelter stays and mental health and/or substance use disorders. A 10-year study showed 63% of participants avoided jail and shelters, compared to 37% of a control group, and a 40% reduction in the average number of hospital inpatient days.⁶ If all 1,000 FUSE participants had received supportive housing and services, NYC could have saved an estimated \$45 million. Based on those findings, providing supportive housing for the estimated 2,600 eligible people incarcerated on Rikers each year would cost just \$108 million annually. By comparison, in 2021, it cost over \$556,000 to incarcerate one person for one year, or \$1.4 billion to incarcerate the 2,600 people who would be made eligible for supportive housing if Introduction 1100-2024 were law.⁷

While it is true that current demand for supportive housing exceeds the supply, this is not a reason for limiting eligibility. The categorical exclusion of people exiting jails and prison after stays of 90 days or longer is a missed opportunity to connect the most vulnerable people to the housing and services they need, thereby increasing public safety. Furthermore, NYC 15/15 was a commitment to develop 15,000 new units of supportive housing over 15 years. Yet, two-thirds of

³ "A Path Forward: The Blueprint to Close Rikers." (March 2025). Independent Rikers Commission. https://bit.ly/Independent_Rikers_Commission_Blueprint_to_Close_Rikers.

⁴ *State of the Homeless 2024: Rights Under Attack, Leadership in Retreat*. (2024). Coalition for the Homeless. <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/state-of-the-homeless-2024/>.

⁵ *Advancing Supportive Housing Solutions to Reduce Homelessness for People Impacted by the Criminal Legal System*. (2022). Corporation for Supportive Housing. <https://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Reduce-Homelessness-for-People-Impacted-by-the-Criminal-Legal-System.pdf>.

⁶ *FUSE 10-Year Follow-Up Report: Initial Findings*. (April 2023). Corporation for Supportive Housing. <https://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/FUSE-10-Year-Report-Initial-Findings.pdf>.

⁷ "Cost of Incarceration per Person in New York City Skyrockets to All-Time High". New York City Comptroller. December 6, 2021. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/comptroller-stringer-cost-of-incarceration-per-person-in-new-york-city-skyrockets-to-all-time-high-2/>.

the way through that timeline, only half of those units have been brought online. The city's focus should be on speeding the timeline for new units, not limiting eligibility.

Supportive housing is an essential tool for reducing homelessness in New York City. The Coalition supports Introduction 1100-2024 as a commonsense way to streamline eligibility for supportive housing and ensure that people exiting incarceration have access to the housing and services needed to support successful re-entry and end the revolving door of jails, hospitals, and homelessness.

About Coalition for the Homeless

The Coalition, founded in 1981, is a not-for-profit advocacy and direct services organization that assists more than 3,500 homeless and at-risk New Yorkers each day. The Coalition advocates for proven, cost-effective solutions to address the crisis of modern homelessness, which is now in its fifth decade. The Coalition also protects the rights of homeless people through litigation involving the right to emergency shelter, the right to vote, the right to reasonable accommodations for those with disabilities, and life-saving housing and services for homeless people living with mental illnesses and HIV/AIDS.

The Coalition operates 11 direct-services programs that offer vital services to homeless, at-risk, and low-income New Yorkers. These programs also demonstrate effective, long-term, scalable solutions and include: permanent housing for formerly homeless families and individuals living with HIV/AIDS; job-training for homeless and low-income women; and permanent housing for formerly homeless families and individuals. Our summer sleep-away camp and after-school program help hundreds of homeless children each year. The Coalition's mobile soup kitchen distributed nearly 400,000 hot, nutritious meals to homeless and hungry people on the streets of the city this past year – up from our usual 320,000. Finally, our Crisis Services Department assists more than 1,000 homeless and at-risk households each month with eviction prevention, individual advocacy, referrals for shelter and emergency food programs, and assistance with public benefits as well as basic necessities such as diapers, formula, work uniforms, and money for medications and groceries. In response to the pandemic, we are operating a special Crisis Hotline (1-888-358-2384) for homeless individuals who need immediate help finding shelter or meeting other critical needs.

The Coalition was founded in concert with landmark right-to-shelter litigation filed on behalf of homeless men and women (*Callahan v. Carey* and *Eldredge v. Koch*) and remains a plaintiff in these now consolidated cases. In 1981, the City and State entered into a consent decree in *Callahan* through which they agreed: "The City defendants shall provide shelter and board to each homeless man who applies for it provided that (a) the man meets the need standard to qualify for the home relief program established in New York State; or (b) the man by reason of physical, mental or social dysfunction is in need of temporary shelter." The *Eldredge* case extended this legal requirement to homeless single women. The *Callahan* consent decree and the *Eldredge* case also guarantee basic standards for shelters for homeless men and women. Pursuant to the decree, the Coalition serves as court-appointed independent monitor of

municipal shelters for homeless single adults, and the City has also authorized the Coalition to monitor the municipal shelter system serving homeless families. In 2017, the Coalition, fellow institutional plaintiff Center for Independence of the Disabled – New York, and homeless New Yorkers with disabilities were represented by Legal Aid and pro-bono counsel White & Case in the settlement of *Butler v. City of New York*, which is designed to ensure that the right to shelter includes accessible accommodations for those with disabilities, consistent with Federal, State, and local laws. During the pandemic, the Coalition worked with Legal Aid to support homeless New Yorkers, including through the *E.G. v. City of New York* Federal class action litigation initiated to ensure Wi-Fi access for students in DHS and HRA shelters, as well as *Fisher v. City of New York*, a lawsuit filed in New York State Supreme Court to ensure homeless single adults gain access to private hotel rooms instead of congregate shelters during the pandemic.



April 16, 2025

Dear Chair Nurse and Members of NYC Committee on Public Safety:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of passing **Intro 1100**.

I am Lauren Velez from the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), a national nonprofit that works to reduce homelessness by helping communities provide permanently affordable housing and wraparound services. Supportive housing is for people who, without services, would not be able to stay housed.

My testimony today is focused on people in NYC who have significant behavioral health needs and are often cycling between jails, prisons, shelters, street homelessness, and emergency rooms. **We are asking the City to expand access to supportive housing for justice-involved people by passing Intro 1100.**

NYC 15/15, the City's primary supportive housing program, aims to create 15,000 units over 15 years for individuals with serious mental illness and/or substance use disorder. Despite being City-funded, the program follows federal chronic homelessness criteria, requiring 12+ months of homelessness and disqualifying those incarcerated for 90+ days by resetting their homelessness status. These barriers exclude thousands of individuals exiting Rikers Island, prisons, and other carceral settings, preventing access to stable housing and undermining the program's mission. Expanding eligibility is crucial to ensuring NYC 15/15 serves those who need it most.

Instead of providing housing upon release from carceral settings, NYC 15/15 -- the City's primary supportive housing program -- forces people into shelters to generate time as homeless to meet chronicity criteria, perpetuating the cycle of homelessness.

The Problem

- The average stay at Rikers for individuals with serious mental illness is **287 days**—long enough to reset their homelessness status, disqualifying them from NYC 15/15 upon release. This average length of stay does not include those with a substance use disorder, undercounting the actual need.
- **41–54%** of people leaving NYS prisons have entered NYC shelters each year since 2015, further burdening the system.
- **33%** of people admitted to NYC jails in 2023 were unhoused prior to incarceration, demonstrating a clear link between homelessness and jail stays.

The Solution

This bill effectively **eliminates the 90-day incarceration reset rule**, allowing those with longer jail and prison stays to qualify. Intro 1100 expands eligibility for city-funded supportive housing to:

- Individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- Those justice-involved in the past 12 months.

Why it Matters

- Expands supportive housing access to at least 2,600 individuals detained on Rikers each year, preventing long shelter stays and street homelessness upon release.



April 16, 2025

- **Saves Money:** Supportive housing for 2,600 people costs ~\$108M/year, vs. \$1.4B for incarceration—a \$1.2B net savings.
- **Immediate Budget Impact:** NYC can save \$150M in FY26 by cutting vacant Dept. of Correction positions and can reinvest a portion of those resources in supportive housing.

NYC's leadership commitment to closing the jails on Rikers island by 2027 takes steadfast and consistent investment in community-based organizations. More than 50% of people currently detained on Rikers island have a mental health diagnosis, and hundreds of people languish on Rikers every day simply because they are homeless. Investments in adequate housing and services allow our City to have proactive resources before people interact with the criminal legal system.

Respectfully,

Lauren Velez, Director of the Metro Team at Corporation for Supportive Housing

Testimony of Housing Works
Submitted to
The New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice
April 16, 2025

Thank you, Chairperson Nurse, and Members of the Committee on Criminal Justice, for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Housing Works, a healing community founded in 1990 with a mission to end the dual crises of homelessness and AIDS. We currently provide a range of integrated medical, behavioral health, housing, and support services for over 15,000 low-income New Yorkers annually, with a focus on the most marginalized and underserved—those facing the challenges of homelessness, HIV, mental health issues, substance use disorder, other chronic conditions, and incarceration. and, most recently, migrants displaced from their homes due to violence or other crises who seek safety and a better life in the United States.

Housing Works supports all of the initiatives considered at your April 16, 2025, hearing, and offers our particular support for Intro 1100-2024, Res 0371, and the March 2025 recommendations of the Independent Rikers Commission Blueprint to Close Rikers.

Intro 1100-2024 will expand access to supportive housing for justice-involved New Yorkers

Housing Works strongly urges the City to amend eligibility for City and State funded supportive housing programs to remove, to the extent possible, the requirement that residents meet the federal definition of “chronic homelessness” which requires demonstration of 12+ months of homelessness. This definition can be difficult or impossible for many people experiencing homelessness to demonstrate, and while we acknowledge that it is a requirement for programs funded at least in part by Federal Continuum of Care homeless housing funding, the City should not employ the definition to define eligibility for any program that does not receive CoC funding.

Intro 1100-2024 represents an important step in that direction, expanding access to supportive housing for justice-involved adults and families with a qualifying head of household, who would be disqualified under the chronic homelessness definition which resets the 12-month clock for persons incarcerated for 90 days or more. Specifically, this would enable New Yorkers incarcerated within the past 12 months to access to NYC 15/15, the City’s primary supportive housing program established in 2015, which aims to create 15,000 units over 15 years for individuals with serious mental illness and/or substance use disorder. It is estimated that this change would expand access to at least 2,600 individuals detained on Rikers each year, where the average stay for someone with serious mental illness is 287 days. Given that some 33% of people admitted to NYC jails in 2023 were unhoused prior to their incarceration, excluding them from supportive housing upon reentry condemns them to continued homelessness and increased risk of a return to incarceration.

The need is great. Justice Involved Supportive Housing (JISH), the only NYC program specifically designed for people leaving Rikers who are at risk of homelessness and in need of behavioral health support, is underfunded and insufficient. As part of the Rikers closure plan, the City committed to funding 500 JISH units, yet only 120 have been opened.

Housing Works acknowledges that the City has fallen behind on its 15/15 commitment to develop 15,000 by 2030, with less than half of the units in the pipeline. But that is no reason to exclude justice-involved New Yorkers from eligibility for the program. Demand exceeds supply for almost

all affordable and supportive housing programs, but lack of adequate resources should not dictate whether or not someone is eligible for critical programs. We should collectively advocate for more resources instead of excluding vulnerable people. Indeed, the current chronic homelessness eligibility requirement has likely prevented providers who serve justice-involved New Yorkers from developing 15/15 projects.

Housing Works supports Res 371 and NYS passage of the Reentry Assistance Bill

Housing Works fully supports passage by the New York State Legislature of S6222/A6990, the Reentry Assistance Bill, which would create a program to provide stipends for people released from a NYS correctional facility after serving six months or more, and City Council Res 371 calling for its enactment.

Housing Works is well aware of the many challenges facing people reentering the community from incarceration. Housing Works is proud to operate MOCJ Emergency and Transitional Housing (MOCJ ETH), which provides up to twelve months of a safe stable place to live for people leaving incarceration without housing, while providing vocational, educational, and therapeutic services as well as assistance to secure permanent housing. Housing Works, as one of several non-profit MOCJ ETH program providers, provides 356 beds combined with skills building, job training, access to medical and behavioral health services, and housing placement assistance. Originally initiated during the COVID crisis, the MOCJ ETH program has been continued and expanded in recognition of the fact that New Yorkers leaving incarceration often require housing assistance and supportive services to make a successful transition back into the community.

According to the Coalition for the Homeless, every year since 2015, between 41 and 54 percent of people returning to NYC from state prisons were discharged directly into City shelters. For many incarcerated New Yorkers, who leave prison without a home or social safety net, it is difficult or impossible to meet even immediate needs without some source of financial support. Even a basic stipend of \$425 monthly for six months can mean the difference between a chance at successful reentry or a return to homelessness and risk of reincarceration. Providing this support is not only the right thing to do but the fiscally responsible way to support formerly incarcerated New Yorkers.

Housing Works supports the recommendations of the Independent Rikers Commission

Housing Works commends the Independent Rikers Commission for its well-researched and thoughtful Blueprint to Close Rikers, which offers common sense and practical recommendations to speed the process for closing Rikers, including appointment of senior point people to lead the effort full-time, while taking immediate action to invest in the creation of a robust community-based infrastructure of housing coupled with medical and behavioral health supports that will enable vulnerable New Yorkers to avoid incarceration and receive the care they need in the community. In addition to treatment beds, it is essential to fund programs for those who can be safely supported in the community.

For over 35 years, Housing Works has successfully employed low- threshold, harm reduction strategies to engage the most marginalized New Yorkers in effective care to address co-occurring medical, mental health, and substance use disorders. We provide over 700 units of supportive housing for the most vulnerable New Yorkers, including many residents people dealing with co-occurring mental health and substance use issues. What we have learned first-hand is that New

Yorkers struggling to cope with serious mental health issues face multiple, significant barriers to voluntary access to the care they seek, especially those who are also trying to survive without a safe, stable place to live. These often-insurmountable barriers include a lack of supportive housing, low reimbursement rates for needed services, a shortage of health care professionals, high caseloads, and low pay for contracted service workers that makes it difficult to recruit or retain staff. It is inexcusable that as a result, on any given day, there are approximately 1,400 people with serious mental illness in City jails, where mental health services are woefully inadequate, leaving our most vulnerable New Yorkers to cycle between the streets, shelters, and jails with little or no access to voluntary care.

Housing Works knows all too well how difficult it can be to establish community-based services for New Yorkers struggling with mental health and substance use disorders while experiencing homelessness. After four years of fruitless efforts to work with the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to open an innovative new model of comprehensive housing and services for unsheltered New Yorkers, Housing Works is seeking \$12M annually in New York City Council funding for the project, which would support 166 private safe haven beds, a co-located drop in center with on-site medical and behavioral health crisis care, and access to a full range of health, mental health, and substance use services through a proximately located Housing Works Federally Qualified Health Center—as well as debt service on a non-profit owned facility available for NYC use for at least 60 years.

Our goal is to pilot a model that 1) engages NYC’s hardest-to-reach populations who reject “traditional” DHS services, 2) provides sustained high-quality care to addresses chronic medical and mental health conditions, substance use, and overdose, 3) demonstrates long-term cost savings by reducing avoidable utilization of jails, hospital emergency department and other city resources, and 4) works intensively with stabilized residents to secure appropriate permanent housing placements.

Between 2020 and 2022, Housing Works received both DHS and OMB approval to operate the proposed model at three distinct locations: Chelsea, Chinatown, and Jamaica. Unfortunately, in all three cases, the sites fell through for different reasons (in June 2020 the Chelsea hotel owner pulled out one week before opening, betting that NYC tourism would rebound; in May 2022 the hotels union persuaded the Mayor to object to and kill the Chinatown project; and in February 2023 the Jamaica hotel operator reneged on its deal with Housing Works to pursue—successfully—a more lucrative contract to use the site as a DHS City Sanctuary Facility).

Housing Works has now identified a former Holiday Inn on West 48th Street in Manhattan that can be acquired through DHS’s nonprofit-owned (NPO) program, using a 30-year service contract to fund the acquisition and renovation. The proposed location is also strategically located just two avenues away from Housing Works’ Westside Health Center, also on West 48th Street, a Federally Qualified Health Center that offers primary health care, substance use services, and a robust New York State Article 31 Office of Mental Health (OMH) program. However, DHS has informed Housing Works that they will no longer support the project because they are only interested in facilities located at the ends of the transit lines in Coney Island, Staten Island, and the Bronx. Housing Works asserts, however, that parts of Midtown West, including Hell’s Kitchen and edges of the Theater District and transit hub, have long experienced an unmet need for street homeless services and substance use and mental health interventions. Therefore, we are seeking City Council funding to make the project possible.

We offer this as just one example demonstrating the many barriers to the innovation needed to transform our response to the avoidable and dehumanizing cycle of homelessness, incarceration, and mental health crises endured by the most vulnerable New Yorkers. We must close Rikers as soon as possible, while creating community based systems required to dramatically lower the number of New Yorkers that end up in jail due to lack of care.

Thank you for your consideration. Please direct any questions Anthony Feliciano, Vice President of Community Mobilization at Housing Works, Inc., at a.feliciano@housingworks.org.



Testimony

by

Yonah Zeitz, New York Advocacy Director
yonah@katalcenter.org

for

Committee on Criminal Justice

Wednesday, April 16, 2025 -- 12:00 PM
New York, NY

Thank you, Chair Sandy Nurse, for holding today's Committee on Criminal Justice. My name is Yonah Zeitz and I am the New York Advocacy Director at the Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice. We're a Brooklyn-based organization with members from across the city and state, including people who have been incarcerated, family members of currently and formerly incarcerated people, and more. Many of our members know from experience exactly how horrific and deadly Rikers really is. All of us are deeply concerned by the ongoing disaster unfolding in the city's jail system. We've been working to shut down Rikers since our founding in 2015.

The recent Lippman Commission report marshals an enormous body of evidence about the horrors, dysfunction, and waste at Rikers, and reiterates the urgent necessity that the jail complex must be shut down.ⁱ As such, I won't reiterate those facts here. One of the most significant findings of the report, the one most highlighted in the press about the report findings, is that the City is far, far-off track from meeting the legal requirement to close Rikers by 2027. We've been saying this for yearsⁱⁱ – including in repeated testimony before this Councilⁱⁱⁱ – and now the Lippmann Commission is finally saying it too: under current conditions, Rikers will not be closed by 2027 as required by law.

But there are some glaring omissions in the report -- it doesn't meaningfully address *why* the plan is off track; or explicitly *define* who is responsible for this failure or explain what it means for New Yorkers, particularly those directly impacted by Rikers, that the mayor of our city is simply ignoring the closure law; or address steps the City Council should take to address that fact.

Yesterday, the Council filed suit against Mayor Adams over the decision to allow ICE back onto Rikers Island.^{iv} We applaud this decision. Years ago, following the leadership from community groups across the city, the Council passed a law prohibiting ICE from operating at Rikers, and it's right for the Council to *aggressively* use every tool at its disposal to hold the mayor accountable to the law and protect New Yorkers.

Where is this same energy when it comes to *closing* the Rikers Island Jail Complex? Where is this same energy to hold the mayor accountable to the law passed in 2019 to shut down Rikers by 2027? Community groups, including Katal, have been pleading with the Council for years to take bold action to hold this administration accountable to the closure law, to use every possible measure to ensure that the city would meet the 2027 deadline to close Rikers, including if necessary, holding up the city budget. But the Council has done little to hold the line on the 2027 closure law, even as the death toll continues its grisly rise under Mayor Adams.^v

The Council's inaction is one reason why a federal court is on the verge of taking control of Rikers away from the city by appointing an independent receiver to improve conditions at the island complex. And it's why, at the state-level, legislation is moving to increase jail oversight and overhaul the State Commission of Correction which has the power to close Rikers Island.^{vi} The consistent violations of the rights of incarcerated people and the ongoing crises unfolding in New York City jails is compelling action by other branches of government – why not here at the City Council?

Mayor Adams has made a regular practice of ignoring the previous recommendations from the Lippman Commission, and he's ignoring the closure law itself. If the Council won't hold the mayor accountable to follow the law and related administrative steps to close Rikers by 2027, then the Council bears responsibility, with the mayor, for the abandonment of the closure plan. Before spending any more time discussing the latest round of recommendations by the Lippman Commission, we urge the Council to get focused here by holding this mayor accountable to the law.

ⁱ “A Path Forward: The Blueprint to Close Rikers.” Independent Rikers Commission. March 2025. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b6de4731aef1de914f43628/t/67dd7c6d4e5dca1fa86db6d8/1742568562268/Independent+Rikers+Commission+Blueprint+to+Close+Rikers+Island+March+2025.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Press Release. “Community Groups Call on the Council to Hold Adams Accountable for Shutting Rikers and Addressing Dangerous Conditions.” Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice. January 30, 2025. <https://katalcenter.org/community-groups-call-on-the-council/>. gabriel sayegh. “Mayor Adams talks about closing Rikers while working to keep it open.” Amsterdam News. June 6, 2024. <https://amsterdamnews.com/news/2024/06/06/mayor-adams-talks-about-closing-rikers-while-working-to-keep-it-open/>. Press Release. “Community Groups, Elected Officials, and Directly Impacted People Rally To Call for Federal Courts to Take Over Rikers.” Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice. December 14, 2023. <https://katalcenter.org/shut-rikers-rally-at-foley-square/>. gabriel sayegh. “Eric Adams has failed. It's time for a federal receiver to take over at Rikers.” City & State. July 28, 2023. <https://www.cityandstateny.com/opinion/2023/07/opinion-eric-adams-has-failed-its-time-federal-receiver-take-over-rikers/388948/>. Press Release. “People Impacted by Rikers, with Elected Officials and Community Groups, Rally Outside of the Courthouse in Support of a Federal Receiver and to Demand Closure of Rikers Island.” Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice. April 27, 2023. <https://katalcenter.org/release-people-impacted-by-rikers-rally-at-foley-square/>. Press Release. “As Federal Court Holds Hearing on Crises at Rikers, Community Groups and Elected Officials Hold Protest to Demand Immediate Action.” Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice. June 13, 2023. <https://katalcenter.org/receivership-action-june-13/>. gabriel sayegh. “Rikers Crisis Demands Federal Receiver.” City Limits. November 17, 2022. <https://citylimits.org/opinion-rikers-crisis-demands-federal-receiver/>. Yonah Zeitz. “We Don't Need a ‘Plan B,’ Mayor Adams; New York City Needs You to Shut Rikers Down.” Gotham Gazette. September 7, 2022. <https://www.gothamgazette.com/130-opinion/11565-plan-b-mayor-adams-new-york-city-close-rikers>

ⁱⁱⁱ “Testimony at Committee on Criminal Justice Hearing.” Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice. January 30, 2025. <https://katalcenter.org/testimony-at-committee-on-criminal-justice-hearing/>. “Testimony at Joint Budget Hearing Held by the New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice and the Committee on Finance.” Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice. May 17, 2024. <https://katalcenter.org/katal-testifies-at-doc-budget-hearing/>. “Testimony at Committee on Criminal Justice Preliminary Budget Hearing for the Department of Correction.” Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice. March 8, 2024. <https://katalcenter.org/statement-from-the-katal-center-on-budget-hearing/>.

“Testimony for Committee on Finance Oversight Hearing.” Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice. December 11, 2023. <https://katalcenter.org/testimony-for-committee-on-finance-oversight-hearing-12-11-23/>. “Testimony for NYC City Council Committee on Criminal Justice Oversight Hearing – Alternatives to Detention and Incarceration in New York City.” Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice. November 30, 2023. <https://katalcenter.org/testimony-for-nyc-city-council-committee-on-criminal-justice-oversight-hearing/>. “Testimony at City Council Preliminary Budget Hearing: Committee on Criminal Justice.” Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice. March 23, 2023. <https://katalcenter.org/katal-testimony-at-city-council-preliminary-budget-hearing-criminal-justice/>

iv “New York City Council Files Lawsuit to Stop Mayor Adams’ Illegal Executive Order Inviting President Trump’s ICE into Rikers to Set Up Office, Seeking Court’s Immediate Halt of Activity.” New York City Council. April 15, 2025. <https://council.nyc.gov/news/2025/04/15/new-york-city-council-files-lawsuit-to-stop-mayor-adams-illegal-executive-order-inviting-president-trumps-ice-into-rikers-to-set-up-office-seeking-courts-immediate-halt-of/>

v “Another Death at Rikers, the 5th Death in the Last Six Weeks.” Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice. April 1, 2025. <https://katalcenter.org/another-death-at-rikers-the-5th-death-in-the-last-six-weeks/>

vi “Senate Bill 856 (Salazar) Advances through Senate Crime, Crime Victims, and Correction Committee.” Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice. February 4, 2025. <https://katalcenter.org/senate-bill-856-salazar-advances/>



**Testimony on Behalf of Legal Action Center
New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice
April 16, 2025**

Dear Chairwoman Nurse and esteemed members of the Committee on Criminal Justice,

My name is Jason Rodriguez. Today, I testify on behalf of the Legal Action Center (LAC), a nonprofit organization dedicated to ending discrimination against individuals with histories of addiction, involvement in the criminal legal system, or living with HIV/AIDS. We advocate for evidence-based public policies that promote recovery, public health, and successful reentry.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit this written testimony in strong support of Intro 1100-2024, which would expand eligibility for the city's supportive housing programs to include individuals with severe mental illness, substance use disorders, or both, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and have had recent justice system involvement; Intro 1241-2025, which would require the Department of Correction to study the City's Article 6A early release program, identify inefficiencies, and issue quarterly reports on its use; and Intro 1240-2025, which seeks to establish a holistic needs assessment program at the time of arrest.

Intro 1100-2024

Supportive housing is a proven strategy to stabilize individuals facing complex needs, reduce costly reliance on emergency services, and support desistance. New York City's Justice-Involved Supportive Housing (JISH) initiative has shown measurable success. Developed by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the program serves people with frequent jail and shelter stays *and* serious behavioral health needs. An evaluation of JISH found that participants experienced a 38% reduction in returns to jail and that the program generated estimated public cost savings of \$16,000 per person per year across jail, shelter, and health systems.¹ It has been effective not only in keeping people out of the criminal legal system, but in stabilizing people in their communities. Yet, the program remains underfunded and under-implemented: as of 2024, only 120 of the originally planned 500 JISH units were in operation.²

¹ New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. *Justice-Involved Supportive Housing (JISH) Evaluation Summary*. 2021.

² David Brand, "Bill Would Make It Easier for New Yorkers Leaving Jail to Qualify for Supportive Housing," *City Limits*, December 19, 2023.

Many individuals returning from jail or prison are ineligible for supportive housing, despite meeting clear behavioral health and housing need criteria. This creates a revolving door between shelters, jails, and hospitals. People living with substance use disorders and serious mental illness are disproportionately affected—and in particular, Black and Brown New Yorkers, who are more likely to experience both homelessness and incarceration. In 2023, one-third of all jail admissions in New York City were individuals experiencing homelessness.³

Current policy deepens this injustice. Under federal rules, incarceration for more than 90 days resets a person's homelessness status, disqualifying them from NYC 15/15 housing upon release, even if they were previously eligible. This creates a cruel paradox: people are often jailed as a consequence of housing instability—then, upon release, they are excluded from the very housing programs that could prevent further system involvement. Each year, an estimated 2,600 individuals detained on Rikers Island would newly qualify for supportive housing under Intro 1100.⁴

Supportive housing is also a cost-saving intervention. Providing supportive housing to the 2,600 eligible individuals currently detained at Rikers is estimated to cost significantly less per person per year compared to incarceration.⁵ Additionally, Intro 1100 opens the door for reallocation: for example, the City could save substantial funds by cutting vacant DOC positions and reinvesting a portion of those funds in housing solutions.⁶

Numerous New York City-based organizations have demonstrated the success of supportive housing and reentry-focused service models. The Fortune Society serves more than 11,000 people annually with a continuum of services including transitional and permanent supportive housing, behavioral health support, and job readiness.⁷ Their scattered-site and congregate housing programs provide safe, supportive environments specifically for people returning from incarceration. Similarly, HousingPlus serves justice-involved women and families through housing paired with trauma-informed services and individualized case management.⁸ Church Avenue Merchants Block Association (CAMBA) offers permanent supportive housing, including for individuals with serious mental illness and histories of justice involvement.⁹ These models have worked, and prove that providing safe, stable housing to individuals returning from incarceration is not only feasible—it is effective and transformative.

³ Data Collaborative for Justice. *Racial Disparities in the Use of Jail Across New York City, 2016–2021*. John Jay College of Criminal Justice, February 2023.

⁴ Fortune Society. "One Pager on Intro 1100," 2025 – can be provided upon request.

⁵ *Ibid.* Estimates that supportive housing for 2,600 people would cost approximately \$108 million per year, compared to \$1.4 billion for incarceration—resulting in a net savings of \$1.2 billion.

⁶ Independent Budget Office. *Budget Options for New York City: Revising or Eliminating Programs*. March 2023, <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/budgetoptions-2023-revising-or-eliminating-programs.html>.

⁷ The Fortune Society. "What We Do." April 2025. <https://fortunesociety.org/what-we-do/>

⁸ HousingPlus. "Justice Initiatives." April 2025. <https://housingplusnyc.org/programs/justice-initiatives/>
HousingPlus. "Comprehensive Services." April 2025. <https://housingplusnyc.org/programs/comprehensive-services/>

⁹ HousingPlus. "Justice Initiatives." Accessed April 2025. <https://housingplusnyc.org/programs/justice-initiatives/>
HousingPlus. "Comprehensive Services." Accessed April 2025. <https://housingplusnyc.org/programs/comprehensive-services/>

Expanding eligibility criteria to include justice-involved individuals with behavioral health needs is not simply a policy correction—it is a strategy for reducing homelessness, slowing jail churn, and promoting public health and long-term community safety. Stable housing with embedded support services increases the likelihood that individuals can succeed in their recovery, engage in employment or education, and rebuild community ties. It also significantly reduces the likelihood of future system involvement.¹⁰

We urge the New York City Council to pass Int. 1100-2024 and correct an exclusion that undermines the very purpose of supportive housing programs. Even now, the city has struggled to deliver on its promise of supportive housing. NYC 15/15, the city’s largest initiative of its kind, remains far behind schedule. As of early 2024, fewer than 4,000 of the planned 15,000 units had been completed.¹¹ The city must prioritize bringing these units online faster, or risk repeating the cycle of unmet need—even when access is finally expanded.

Intro 1241-2025

We now turn to Int. 1241-2025, which would require the Department of Correction (DOC) to conduct a study of the City’s Article 6A early release program, identify inefficiencies, and issue quarterly reports on its use.

The 6A early release program, established through Article 6A of the New York State Correction Law, allows city-sentenced individuals to serve the remainder of their sentence at home under supervision. During the COVID-19 pandemic, DOC expanded use of the program to reduce jail crowding, resulting in a 75% drop in the number of people serving city sentences—from 553 on March 22, 2020, to 125 a month later.¹² That short-term successes experienced at the height of COVID-19, demonstrated the potential of utilizing existing authority to prioritize safety, health, and reentry over incarceration.

However, in the years since, use of the 6A program has stalled, and the public remains largely in the dark about how and when it is applied. The absence of consistent data makes it difficult to assess whether 6A is being used equitably—whether people of color, women, individuals in borough-based facilities, or those with mental health or substance use histories are being systematically excluded from early release opportunities.¹³ This legislation would address that gap by requiring DOC to study program inefficiencies, recommend strategies for broader use, and issue quarterly data disaggregated by facility and outcome.¹⁴

¹⁰ Aurand, Andrew. “How Jail and Prison In-Reach Programs Improve Housing Outcomes and Reduce Recidivism.” *Housing Matters, Urban Institute*, January 31, 2024.

¹¹ Brand, “*Bill Would Make It Easier for New Yorkers.*”

¹² Legal Action Center. *Expanding Alternatives to Incarceration in NYC: A Pathway to Safely Closing Rikers Island*. 2024, p. 3. <https://www.lac.org/resource/expanding-alternatives-to-incarceration-in-nyc-a-pathway-to-safely-closing-rikers-island>

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁴ New York City Council. *Int. 1241-2025: A Local Law in relation to a study and reporting on the use of the department of correction early release 6A program.*

The Legal Action Center has called for precisely this reform. In our 2025 report, written on behalf of the NYC ATI and Reentry Coalition, *Expanding Alternatives to Incarceration in NYC: A Pathway to Safely Closing Rikers Island*, we urged the City to fully implement its 6A Work Release authority and commit to decarceration pathways that include early release, not just program diversion.¹⁵ We emphasize that the success of alternatives to incarceration depends not only on eligibility criteria but also on bold policy action—especially when the costs of incarceration are so high. The human impact of incarceration at Rikers, including dozens of preventable deaths, unsafe conditions, and lack of treatment access, is well-documented.¹⁶ Our report includes the voices of system-impacted New Yorkers who experienced the difference that timely release and community support can make, and the robust deployment of 6A is one tool the City has to increase opportunities for release.¹⁷ While those individual stories are beyond the scope of this testimony, they remain a vital reminder of what’s at stake.

This bill supports the values and work of the ATI and Reentry Coalition. Our member organizations serve over 30,000 people each year through reentry, treatment, and housing programs.¹⁸ Early release under 6A, when implemented thoughtfully and paired with community-based services, gives people the chance to return home, reconnect with loved ones, and access the resources that support long-term transformation. These are the conditions under which desistance occurs—the process by which people cease criminalized behavior and build new trajectories rooted in health and purpose.¹⁹

Critically, research confirms that structured early release improves individual and public outcomes. A 2022 evaluation by the National Institute of Justice found that coordinated reentry services—particularly education, employment support, and housing—significantly reduce the likelihood of future system contact.²⁰ Similarly, a Brennan Center study reported that individuals released under the First Step Act had a 9.7% reconviction rate compared to 46.2% among all formerly incarcerated individuals released from federal prisons in 2018.²¹ These findings underscore the effectiveness of early release programs in enhancing public safety and long-term stability.

Transparency is not only good governance—it’s essential to justice. Requiring DOC to produce disaggregated quarterly reports will shed light on how early release decisions are made, who benefits, and where inequities persist. This data can guide policy improvements, help

<https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?From=RSS&GUID=2E947574-33F3-4930-9191-2C4FD7644231&ID=7293257>

¹⁵ LAC, *Expanding Alternatives*, p. 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

¹⁸ Legal Action Center. *ATI and Reentry Coalition*. <https://www.lac.org/major-project/ny-ati-reentry-coalition>

¹⁹ Heidemann, Gretchen, Josie S. Hahn, and Patrick J. Kennedy. “Desistance as an Outcome of Reentry Services: Lessons from Evaluation Research.” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, vol. 57, no. 4 (2018): 243–266.

²⁰ Davis, Lois M., et al. *Evaluation of the Second Chance Act Adult Demonstration Projects*. National Institute of Justice, 2022. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/301497.pdf>

²¹ Brennan Center for Justice. *Reconviction Rates of First Step Act Releases*. Accessed April 2025.

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/reconviction-rates-first-step-act-releases>

community-based providers align services with need, and ensure that all eligible individuals are given a fair opportunity for release. The urgency of this action cannot be overstated—without timely intervention, we risk allowing underused and opaque systems to reinforce inequities and undermine public safety goals.

Int. 1241-2025 does not change the eligibility for early release, but it does bring urgently needed transparency and accountability to a tool the City already has. By illuminating barriers and pathways within the 6A program, this bill will strengthen our reentry infrastructure, reduce reliance on incarceration, and improve the well-being of individuals and communities.

The Legal Action Center strongly urges the Council to pass this bill. We stand ready to support its implementation and to continue advocating for a justice system rooted in dignity, accountability, and care.

Intro 1240

Finally, we turn to Int. 1240-2025, which seeks to establish a holistic needs assessment program for individuals at the time of arrest. This legislation signifies a meaningful shift toward a more equitable and health-centered legal system. By authorizing the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ) to conduct voluntary assessments upon arrest, the City can identify critical behavioral health conditions, trauma histories, cognitive disabilities, and other psychosocial factors that often go unrecognized. Providing this information to defense counsel within 14 days of arraignment equips legal actors with the tools to make more informed decisions regarding charging, plea offers, pretrial detention, and alternatives to incarceration.

Implementing a holistic needs assessment at the point of arrest is not merely a procedural enhancement; it is a critical intervention that addresses systemic inequities and promotes justice. By proactively identifying and addressing the underlying factors contributing to criminal legal system contact—such as mental health needs, substance use, trauma, and cognitive or developmental challenges—the City can advance a model that supports both fairness and public safety.

This approach not only benefits the individuals directly involved, but also helps legal system actors resolve cases more effectively and humanely. The urgency to adopt such measures is underscored by growing consensus among community-based practitioners, researchers, and legal system stakeholders on the limitations of punitive responses and the effectiveness of compassionate, informed alternatives to incarceration.^{22 23 24}

²² LEAD National Support Bureau. “What Is LEAD?” Accessed April 2025. <https://www.leadbureau.org/what-is-lead>

²³ National Institute of Justice. “Risk and Needs Assessment.” U.S. Department of Justice. Accessed April 2025.

²⁴ Mital, Seema, Erin A. Baldwin, Joseph J. Palamar, et al. “Community-Based Substance Use Treatment Programs for Justice-Involved Adults: A Scoping Review.” *Health & Justice*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2024. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10901914>

Research indicates that individuals entering the criminal legal system frequently have untreated or underdiagnosed behavioral health conditions. A 2022 analysis reported that more than 44% of incarcerated individuals in the U.S. had a history of mental illness.²⁵ A national call for reform has emphasized that jails and prisons now operate as de facto mental health institutions—despite being ill-equipped for that role.²⁶ Studies consistently show that over 75% of incarcerated people have experienced serious trauma or abuse during their lifetimes.²⁷ Without early identification, these needs remain unmet, leading to decisions based on incomplete information and often exacerbating the conditions that contributed to system involvement. This bill introduces infrastructure to change that dynamic by initiating assessments at the outset of the legal process.

New York City has existing models to guide implementation—and a community infrastructure ready to lead it. The ATI and Reentry Coalition, which the Legal Action Center is proud to lead, includes many of the organizations already delivering this type of assessment-driven support. For example, the Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES) operates court-based behavioral health programs connecting individuals with serious mental illness to treatment and community support before cases advance. Participants in its Nathaniel Clinic and Court Diversion programs report reduced re-arrest rates and improved mental health outcomes.²⁸ Similarly, the Center for Community Alternatives (CCA) employs assessments to advocate for diversion and pre-plea alternatives, assisting individuals in addressing core needs through supportive services rather than incarceration.²⁹ The Osborne Association’s Prepare program embeds licensed social workers in courtrooms to assess psychosocial needs and recommend alternatives to incarceration. A 2024 evaluation by John Jay College found that participants in the Prepare program had significantly lower rearrest and reconviction rates compared to a matched comparison group.³⁰

The benefits of early needs identification extend beyond individual outcomes, enhancing both public safety and procedural justice. Research on desistance demonstrates that when individuals are met with care, stability, and opportunities to address underlying needs, their likelihood of future system contact decreases substantially.³¹ Legal actors benefit from timely access to reliable assessments, particularly when making decisions about bail, risk, supervision, or service-based alternatives. Without this information, courts often make consequential decisions without a full understanding of an individual's circumstances, leading to unjust outcomes and missed

²⁵ Renetta Weaver. “The Demand for Mental Health Services in Prisons is Surging.” *Verywell Mind*, April 5, 2022. <https://www.verywellmind.com/demand-for-mental-health-services-surges-in-jails-5224649>

²⁶ “We Must Change How Our Criminal Justice System Treats People with Mental Illness.” *Time*, August 4, 2020. <https://time.com/5876045/we-must-change-how-our-criminal-justice-system-treats-people-with-mental-illness/>

²⁷ Miller, Naomi A., and Lisa M. Najavits. “Creating Trauma-Informed Correctional Care: A Balance of Goals and Environment.” *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2012.

²⁸ CASES. “Behavioral Health Programs.” Accessed April 10, 2025. <https://www.cases.org/what-we-do/behavioral-health/>

²⁹ Center for Community Alternatives. “Court Advocacy.” Accessed April 10, 2025. <https://www.communityalternatives.org/programs/2a1-court-advocacy>

³⁰ Tomberg, Kathleen A., and Gina Moreno. “The Osborne Association Prepare Program: Recidivism Analysis.” *John Jay College Research and Evaluation Center*, March 14, 2024. <https://johnjayrec.nyc/2024/03/14/preparerecidivism2024/>

³¹ Heidemann, Gretchen, Josie S. Hahn, and Patrick J. Kennedy. “Desistance as an Outcome of Reentry Services: Lessons from Evaluation Research.” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, vol. 57, no. 4, 2018.

opportunities for treatment. Holistic assessments can disrupt this cycle, reducing incarceration rates, promoting long-term community integration, improving health and housing stability, and safeguarding public safety. They do so by centering dignity and care, enabling tailored responses that reflect the full context of a person's life and needs.

To ensure the program's effectiveness, implementation must adhere to best practices in ethics and efficacy. Assessments should remain voluntary, conducted by qualified professionals using validated tools that consider the lived experiences of those assessed. Importantly, data gathered through this process should be shared only with consent and used solely to support the individual's legal advocacy—not for surveillance, punishment, or civil consequences. While the bill appropriately mandates voluntary and professionally administered assessments, these additional measures are crucial to maintaining the trust, safety, and impact the program aims to achieve.

The Legal Action Center urges the Council to advance Int. 1240-2025. By responding to individuals' needs with care rather than punishment, this bill moves us closer to a legal system that is more just, equitable, and responsive. Early assessments provide a pathway to support individuals at critical moments, enabling the legal system to respond in a fair, proportional, and humane manner.

In conclusion, the Legal Action Center strongly supports Intro 1100-2024, Intro 1240-2025, and Intro 1241-2025. Together, these bills represent a coordinated strategy to expand access to supportive housing, implement holistic needs assessments at the point of arrest, and strengthen the City's early release program under Article 6A. We urge the Council to pass these bills and commit to a more humane, effective, and equitable justice system for all New Yorkers.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony and are available for further discussion.

From: [Misha Nonen](#)
To: [Testimony](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] CJA Testimony for City Council Criminal Justice Committee Hearing 4/15/25
Date: Friday, April 18, 2025 3:12:23 PM
Attachments: [REDACTED]

Dear City Council Member,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the New York City Criminal Justice Agency (CJA) for the New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice.

My name is Misha Nonen and I serve as Chief Program Office for CJA. For the past five decades, CJA has partnered with New York City to reduce unnecessary pretrial detention. We do this by offering personalized support for people involved in the justice system, through developing ground breaking research and accessible data dashboards, and by providing judges and the court with evidence-based information to improve decision making and increase the likelihood that individuals return for all their court dates.

From arraignment through case disposition, CJA provides key supports for nearly every person released after arrest in New York City, but in particular for those arrested and released to Queens Supervised Release. Following bail reform, the number of people entering Supervised Release has increased more than tenfold, and the people entering the Program have been arrested on more serious charges. What's more, a record number of people have been arrested across the five boroughs in the past year, exacerbating the strain put on all of our pretrial programs, but in particular Supervised Release. With this as a backdrop, and with the support of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, CJA – along with CASES in Manhattan – launched the Intensive Case Management Program, which is a supervised release program for higher risk and higher needs participants, in January 2024.

Despite the explosion in participants in our programs, Supervised Release continues to successfully serve the vast majority of clients, allowing participants to remain in their communities and connect with programs and services that support their needs in the short and long term. This success is due in large part to our strong partnerships with community-based nonprofit service partners who can support clients who increasingly are dealing with housing insecurity, substance use disorders, and/or mental health issues.

At a time when there are more people cycling through the justice system in need of more serious support, CJA aligns with the Independent Commission's recommendation to expand

evidence-based programs designed to support this population. We believe that proven programs and services can help the increasing number of high-need New Yorkers get the resources and expertise needed to stay out of the criminal justice system and make our communities safer.

Sincerely,
Misha Nonen



Misha Nonen

Chief Program Officer

Pronouns: She/Her

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Testimony of

Dorothy Weldon
Special Litigation Attorney

New York County Defender Services

Before the

New York City Council
Committee on Criminal Justice

Oversight Hearing on the Independent Rikers Commission's Blueprint to Close Rikers

April 16, 2025

My name is Dorothy Weldon and I am a Special Litigation Attorney at the New York County Defender Services (“NYCDS”). NYCDS is a public defender office based in Manhattan that serves more than 10,000 clients in criminal cases every year and over half a million people since we opened our doors over 25 years ago.

Thank you Chair Nurse for holding this important hearing to outline the tangible steps our city must take to close Rikers.

1. Background

In 2019, after decades of scandal and brutally decrepit and violent conditions, New York City passed a law ordering the closure of Rikers Island by 2026. The plan required the development of smaller, more humane jails in Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens to replace the notorious jail complex, and a mandate to reduce the city-wide jail population to accommodate the smaller facilities. Both the plans to construct the borough-based facilities and the plan to

reduce the population have stalled in recent years. Meanwhile, Rikers Island has plunged into chaos and horror of an almost incomprehensible scale.

We are grateful to the City Council for holding this hearing to explore the concrete steps urgently needed to fulfill the legal mandate to close Rikers.

2. **NYCDS supports [Intro 1100-2024](#), which would remove barriers to supportive housing for individuals recently released from jails and prisons.**

Across the board, housing is the most significant and most intractable obstacle our clients face. Stable housing in New York City is increasingly elusive, even for the vanishing middle class. Those who cannot afford the city's exceedingly expensive market-priced apartments must navigate the labyrinthian, patchwork system of housing assistance programs, including supportive housing.

Not only are applications for these programs prohibitively complex, in many cases, the bureaucratic eligibility requirements outright exclude the very individuals these programs are designed for. In the case of supportive housing, the "chronicity" requirement for eligibility was meant to target individuals who have experienced chronic homelessness. The application of this rule however, has historically excluded most unhoused individuals who have been recently incarcerated.

Yet, many of best candidates for supportive housing are deeply entrenched in the criminal legal system. For decades, our city has defaulted to criminalizing and incarcerating homeless New Yorkers, particularly those struggling with serious mental illness and substance use disorders, rather than routing them to community-based treatment and services. Thus, we see a staggering overrepresentation of unhoused New Yorkers in our courts and in our jails. In 2024, 28% of all the clients that NYCDS met in arraignments reported having unstable housing. And a disproportionate number of these individuals ended up at Rikers. Of all of the clients NYCDS represented who had bail set in their cases, an astounding 46% reported unstable housing. Thus, in order to address the core needs of individuals in our city jails, we must make stable housing, and supportive housing in particular, far more accessible.

Supportive housing is a golden ticket for so many of our clients. Offering affordable housing and onsite services, supportive housing is ideal for many of those returning from Rikers. Participants can [gain access](#) to case management, counseling, government benefits, referrals to medical services and recommendations for other needed services like legal supports. [Research](#) has shown positive outcomes for housing stability, employment, and mental health.

Supportive housing is also a boon to New York City. Supportive housing reduces reliance on other costly systems, thus saving the city money. Individuals are [less likely](#) to have inpatient stays, psychiatric hospital visits, and even jail returns. With the astronomical cost of detaining one person in Rikers for a year at \$1525 a day and a hospital stay also in the thousands, it is in the interest of the city to expand access to these opportunities. Most critically, it can interrupt an individual's cycle of institutionalization and begin a path to self efficacy.

On an individual level, our staff have seen the transformative impact that supportive housing can offer for the clients who have successfully navigated to an apartment. But there are far too few supportive housing units to support the thousands of individuals who desperately need them. Moreover, applying for the opportunities that do exist present incredible administrative challenges and in too many cases, overly complex and narrowly defined eligibility criteria.

Intro 1100, sponsored by Council Member Rivera, is an important step towards lifting the bureaucratic barriers that currently exclude recently incarcerated individuals from qualifying for city-funded supportive housing. The bill would add a path towards eligibility for any individual who has had justice system involvement in the last 12 months, thereby circumventing the chronicity requirement that typically disqualifies recently incarcerated New Yorkers. This would clear the way for so many of our recently incarcerated clients, and create safe landings for so many individuals who are being released from jail and prison.

Our city is one of the most well-resourced municipalities in the world. We must do better to make these critical housing opportunities easier to access for those who need it the most: individuals leaving periods of incarceration. NYCDS therefore supports this proposal and we urge the New York City Council to pass it.

3. NYCDS supports with some reservations [Intro 1238-2025](#), which would allow our incarcerated clients readily available access to their discovery materials.

As public defenders, we are exceedingly familiar with the challenge of ensuring that our clients have access to all materials and discovery in their cases. We broadly support any efforts to expand every incarcerated individual's secure and efficient access to these materials via tablets or the law library. We also support implementing a Board of Corrections' review of these processes and procedures, including a report evaluating the department's ability to provide access to these critical documents.

But given the Department of Corrections's track record, and our clients' current, impermissibly inconsistent access to technologies like tablets and to the law library, we have serious concerns regarding actual implementation. We will continue to support this initiative and similar legislation, but only provided there are no restrictions placed on our clients ability to receive case

materials from their defense teams in paper format (where applicable), by mail—which is often the only reliable way of getting documents to our clients given the Department of Corrections’ interference.

Moreover, we also must note our concerns around privacy and attorney-client privilege. Any information made available on the tablets is by its nature highly sensitive and must remain confidential. This means the technology employed to operate this program must have the capability to maintain privacy. Maintaining confidentiality will also require that the Department develop protocols for staff to follow to ensure the privacy of case information and communication between the defense team and client.

Our office is happy to work with the Council, the Department, and any other stakeholders to work through these issues and other possible implementation challenges.

4. NYCDS supports [Intro 1240-2025](#), which would establish a holistic assessment program, with some caveats.

Many individuals incarcerated at Rikers suffer from underlying mental health and substance use disorders. According to [the latest data](#), 55.5% of individuals who are incarcerated at Rikers have signs of mental illness. These individuals are [especially susceptible to abuse](#) while in jail and are more likely to be traumatized and destabilized by the experience of incarceration. They also end up staying in jail for significantly longer periods than those without mental health diagnoses, which contributes to the unnecessarily inflated jail population.

Many of these individuals can and should be safely treated in the community. Our city’s diversion programs have significantly expanded in recent years, but are [still widely underutilized](#). In part, this is due to structural barriers preventing access to diversion opportunities. To that end, NYCDS strongly supports the Treatment Court Expansion Act (S.4547/A.4869) (formerly known as the “Treatment Not Jail Act”), which would dramatically expand access to and improve our state’s treatment courts. We thank the City Council for passing [Res. 156-2022](#) calling for the state legislature to pass and the Governor to sign this urgently needed legislation.

But some of the roadblocks currently limiting participation in NYC’s diversion programs are simply a matter of resources and coordination. More specifically, every county in New York City is facing substantial backlogs in getting clinical assessments for individuals applying for admission into one of the city’s diversion courts. Potential participants, many of whom are incarcerated at Rikers, are currently expected to wait for months to be screened by licensed clinicians. NYCDS welcomes any measure to ease this backlog and make clinical assessments more accessible to people who are applying for diversion programs, especially those who are incarcerated.

To the extent that [Intro 1240-2025](#) would alleviate this backlog and provide independent clinical assessments that would be accepted by treatment courts in making admissions decisions, NYCDS supports this proposed legislation.

Having said that, NYCDS has some concerns that the proposed legislation is not sufficiently clear with respect to confidentiality. Specifically, the proposed bill states that the assessment (and all information collected during the assessment) must be provided to the person's attorney within 14 days of supreme court arraignment "so it may be provided to the court or the district attorney to inform charging, detention, release, or plea agreement decisions." The phrasing "so it may be provided" might be interpreted as *requiring* the defense to furnish the completed assessment (and the information collected during the assessment) to the court or district attorney upon receiving it from the clinician. Thus, we would propose the following amendment to the bill language to clarify that the defense is not under any circumstances *required* to share the assessment with any outside parties.

c. The office shall provide, within 14 days of a covered person's supreme court arraignment, the holistic needs assessment and all the material information collected during the holistic needs assessment to the covered person's attorney, which so it may be provided to the court or the district attorney to inform charging, detention, release, or plea agreement decisions. The office shall not share any confidential information with any person or entity without the consent of the covered person's attorney.

NYCDS also has some questions around the implementation of this initiative, and would welcome the opportunity to work closely with the Council and stakeholders to ensure the proposed legislation, when passed, is thoughtfully executed.

5. NYCDS supports [Intro 1242-2025](#), which would establish a coordinator to oversee the Closure of Rikers by 2025.

NYCDS supports any initiative that will hasten the closure of the horrific facilities on Rikers Island, provided that the individuals appointed as the full-time coordinator of the Rikers Island closure and the coordinator for borough-based jail transition not be Department of Correction employees. The Department has proven time and again that it is utterly incapable of policing itself. The Department has also gone to great lengths to cover up countless abuses by its own employees on numerous occasions. We cannot and do not expect transparency surrounding this process if Department employees are placed in the driver's seat. Giving the Department more

control over the Rikers closure process will only serve to derail this critical project, and we implore the City Council to ensure that unbiased, outside parties are appointed to these roles.

6. NYCDS supports [Intro 1241-2025](#), which authorizes a study into the effectiveness and inefficiencies of the 6A release program.

NYCDS supports legislation targeted at the inefficiencies of 6A and implores the City Council to go further in demanding transparency from the Department of Correction on early release programs. Early release programs are a potentially profoundly powerful tool for reducing the jail population in New York City. Yet these programs remain essentially a mystery to our clients and our offices. Time and again, individuals and their families come to us—their attorneys, social workers and other defense team members—asking about their ability to apply to programs like 6A. And it is a deeply unfortunate truth that we often have no answers for them. The eligibility criteria is not clear. The application process is not clear. The program parameters are unclear. We do not know why certain clients are granted release. We do not know why certain clients are considered and denied. And we do not know why other clients are never considered at all. The result is a process that appears entirely arbitrary, and certainly feels deeply unfair for our clients and their loved ones.

Every interested party knows that the jail population needs to go down, particularly if New York City is going to achieve the stated goal of closing Rikers Island. Early release programs need to be a more serious part of this conversation. And public defender offices are uniquely situated to help these programs work—by identifying eligible clients, assisting individuals with the application process, and generating release plans tailored to individuals' housing and medical needs, for example. There is simply no meaningful way for NYCDS to collaborate with city efforts to institute early release when there is no transparency around the process.

Jail population levels are going to continue to be an issue as we strive towards closing Rikers. We have already seen the Department of Correction ask for variances in order to house more people in already overcrowded facilities like OBCC. We have also seen the unprecedented move of housing men in Rosies as a result of overcrowding in other facilities. We expect that these overcrowding issues will only worsen, particularly as the fallout from the upstate strikes begins to manifest on Rikers. Specifically, we are anticipating serious issues stemming from the indefinite pause on transfers from Rikers to upstate facilities. The inability to transfer individuals with upstate sentences to upstate facilities is going to create a dangerous backlog, which will mean continued incarceration for individuals who are already at or past their release dates but will remain trapped on Rikers waiting for an upstate transfer before they can be released or assessed by parole for release under supervision.

While local release programs like 6A may not be able to assist these particular individuals awaiting upstate sentences, they can go a long way towards easing already critical problems with overcrowding.

Programs like 6A have an incredible potential for good, but not if they are run in the dark. Only by forcing the Department of Correction to be transparent, and by inviting public defenders in to collaborate, can we make early release successful.

7. NYCDS supports [Res. 371-2024](#).

Of course, the best way to stably reduce the population at Rikers is to stop the revolving door of criminalization, homelessness and incarceration that inevitably ensues after a person is released from jail or prison. To that end, NYCDS supports Res. 371-2024, a resolution in support of a state bill (S6643A/A9115), called the “Gate Money Bill”, that would provide meaningful re-entry support for individuals being discharged from state prison. This groundbreaking bill would provide individuals emerging from prison with reentry cash assistance sufficient to actually meet their most immediate and fundamental needs, like transportation, food, housing, to transition back to the community. This bill would establish funds of about \$2,550 per person, which will be disbursed in monthly installments of \$425.

Currently New Yorkers who are discharged from DOCCS custody are entitled to withdraw the balance of their commissary accounts up to \$200. They are also given a one-way bus ticket back to their community, and DOCCS-issued “identification.” For those residing in New York City, this means thousands of individuals arrive at Port Authority every year supplied with little money, no drivers license or common form of valid identification, and in many cases, with no linkages to the essential housing, services and support they need to live.

The system sets people up to fail upon re-entry. The expectations to immediately find employment and housing, often while complying with parole stipulations, after incarceration, are simply unrealistic. According to [several studies](#) about 70% of people who have committed a crime and those formerly incarcerated have dropped out of high school and most do not have a professional network and have a conspicuous resume gap. This makes finding employment especially hard. While the newly enacted “Fair Chance Act” means that landlords in New York City cannot discriminate based on most criminal convictions, there are still issues with credit histories and the rising affordability crisis in New York that make finding housing difficult as well. Also, many landlords have flouted the law. When we put individuals in a position where they are unable to successfully reintegrate into society we put them at risk for homelessness or reincarceration. It is the government’s failure to provide a successful hand-off from an extremely punitive and isolating environment back to the demanding general population that helps lead to the recidivism we all decry.

This bill would help to be the necessary bridge between prison and reintegration into society. Rather than merely sending people from upstate to the city with nothing to their name, this bill would help people with the essential building blocks they need for their own foundation to begin to thrive.

8. Conclusion

Since 2019, while plans to reduce the population and build the new jail facilities have stalled, Rikers Island has descended into an abyss of incomprehensible cruelty, violence, and dysfunction. The facilities are falling apart. The staff are not showing up to work. No one is getting medical care, and it is an unending struggle for our clients to receive even the most basic needs, like a mattress to sleep on or reliable meal delivery. Since 2022, 38 New Yorkers have lost their lives under these conditions, five in the last three months alone.

The entire jail system is literally and figuratively collapsing. We must do everything in our power to close Rikers. We thank the City Council for holding this hearing today to take tangible steps towards making that happen, and to the Independent Rikers Commission for providing the deep analysis and recommendations that these proposals are based on.

Testimony before the New York City Council

April 16, 2025

Presented by Rich Klein

Chief Development Officer, Providence House

Introduction

Good afternoon, Council Members. My name is Rich Klein, and I am the Chief Development Officer at Providence House, an organization with over 45 years of experience providing trauma-informed housing and support services to women impacted by homelessness and incarceration. We have deep expertise in addressing the unique challenges faced by this population, including systemic inequities, gender-based trauma, and barriers to reentry.

Today, I am honored to speak in strong support of the four bills under consideration, which collectively represent an opportunity to create more equitable, effective, and compassionate systems for justice-involved individuals in New York City.

Supportive Housing Eligibility for Justice-Involved Persons (Intro 1100)

Providence House fully supports Intro 1100, which prioritizes supportive housing for justice-involved individuals experiencing homelessness and behavioral health challenges. We applaud the inclusion of justice-involved populations in supportive housing policy and stress the importance of centering gender-specific needs in these efforts.

Key Points of Support:

- Women and gender-expansive individuals exiting the justice system face compounded challenges, including stigma, family reunification barriers, and gender-based violence. Supportive housing tailored to their needs offers a critical foundation for stability and healing.
- By linking housing to mental health and substance use recovery, this bill aligns with best practices for reducing recidivism.

Recommendations for Improvement:

- **Expand Justice Involved Supportive Housing (JISH) Beyond Scattered Site:** The scattered site housing model under JISH funding creates logistical and operational challenges for community organizations, making it difficult to deliver consistent, centralized services to justice-involved individuals. Shifting to single-site supportive housing models would allow nonprofits to develop purpose-built facilities tailored to the unique needs of this population, fostering community, stability, and accessible services such as counseling and vocational training. JISH funding should also include capital support to enable the development of trauma-informed, gender-responsive spaces that

enhance program effectiveness and sustainability, ensuring better long-term outcomes for justice-involved individuals and their families.

- **Expand Gender-Specific Housing Options:** Require that a percentage of supportive housing units prioritize women and gender-expansive individuals, addressing their unique reentry needs.
- **Family Reunification Services:** Include family support programs within the housing framework to assist with child custody and parenting needs, which are particularly critical for women exiting the criminal justice system.
- **Extended Eligibility Timeline:** Expand the 12-month eligibility limit to 24 months to include individuals with delayed reentry challenges, particularly those rebuilding their lives after incarceration.

Holistic Needs Assessment Program (T2025-3360)

The introduction of a holistic needs assessment program is a groundbreaking initiative. For women and gender-expansive individuals, such assessments can highlight the intersection of trauma, mental health, housing instability, and familial responsibilities, paving the way for meaningful interventions.

Key Points of Support:

- Women and gender-expansive individuals are often disproportionately impacted by trauma and gender-based violence. This legislation ensures those needs are identified early, facilitating targeted and effective interventions.
- Including social and economic factors in the assessment acknowledges the systemic inequities that exacerbate justice involvement.

Recommendations for Improvement:

- **Specialized Gender Lens:** Train assessment teams to apply a gender-specific lens that considers experiences like domestic violence, caregiving responsibilities, and reproductive health needs.
 - **Culturally Competent Trauma-Informed Care:** Ensure assessors have expertise in trauma-informed practices and cultural competency, particularly for populations marginalized by race, gender identity, or socioeconomic status.
 - **Robust Referrals:** Strengthen partnerships with organizations like Providence House that specialize in supporting women and gender-expansive individuals to provide tailored services post-assessment.
-

Coordinator for Rikers Island Closure and Borough-Based Jail Transition (T2025-3359)

As New York City prepares to close Rikers Island, it is essential to ensure that the transition to borough-based jails addresses the needs of women and gender-expansive individuals, who are often overlooked in criminal justice reform efforts.

Key Points of Support:

- Establishing a central coordinator ensures that this historic transition prioritizes equity and inclusivity, with a focus on vulnerable populations.
- The bill's emphasis on repurposing Rikers Island for community benefit aligns with the City's broader goals of sustainability and justice.

Recommendations for Improvement:

- **Dedicated Women's Justice Planning:** Require the coordinator to establish a subcommittee focused on the unique needs of women and gender-expansive individuals during this transition, including facility design and program availability.
- **Supportive Reentry Programs:** Ensure that borough-based jails include robust reentry planning, with gender-responsive services addressing housing, employment, and trauma recovery.
- **Transparency for Marginalized Communities:** Expand community engagement efforts to ensure that women and gender-expansive individuals impacted by the justice system have a voice in the planning and oversight processes.
- **Expanded Coordination and Collaboration:** Appoint multiple coordinators to address the diverse needs of the populations at Rikers, ensuring a more nuanced approach to reentry solutions. Require collaboration with City partners to thoroughly assess the justice-involved population and develop tailored alternatives, such as supportive housing, mental health care, and community-based programs, reducing reliance on incarceration altogether.

Early Release (6A) Program (T2025-3381)

Providence House strongly supports T2025-3381, which seeks to improve and expand the Early Release (6A) Program for individuals incarcerated in New York City jails. The 6A program allows eligible incarcerated individuals to serve the remainder of their sentence at home, under supervision. This program has the potential to be transformative for justice-involved women and gender-expansive individuals, many of whom experience heightened vulnerabilities upon release.

Key Points of Support:

- For women and gender-expansive individuals, home release provides a safer and more supportive environment for reintegration into society. As many are caregivers, parents, or

survivors of domestic violence, stable home environments are crucial for their recovery and success. Home release not only promotes individual stability but also interrupts the generational cycles of incarceration, fostering stronger family and community connections.

- The program's expansion could help address systemic overcrowding in the city's jails and prevent the exacerbation of trauma that often accompanies incarceration.

Recommendations for Improvement:

- **Gender-Specific Considerations for Eligibility:** Ensure that women and gender-expansive individuals who are primary caregivers or survivors of domestic violence are prioritized in the early release process, allowing for more individualized decision-making that takes into account their roles within their families and communities.
- **Comprehensive Reentry Support:** Pair the early release program with gender-responsive reentry services, such as access to mental health counseling, housing support, and family reunification programs, which are especially critical for women returning from incarceration.
- **Transparency and Reporting:** Include disaggregated data in the reports on the early release program to capture the number of women and gender-expansive individuals released and the outcomes associated with their reentry.

Conclusion

Providence House's decades of experience underscore the importance of designing systems that respond to the distinct needs of women and gender-expansive individuals exiting the criminal justice system. These four bills represent a bold step forward in creating an equitable and compassionate justice system in New York City.

I urge the Council to pass these bills, incorporating the recommendations provided to ensure they serve all justice-involved individuals effectively, especially those whose voices have been historically marginalized. Thank you for your leadership on these critical issues, and I welcome any questions.



**TESTIMONY OF
JOSEPH SOTO**

**THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE**

City Hall,
New York, NY

Wednesday, April 16, 2025

SUBJECT: Oversight Hearing

PURPOSE: To advocate for Resolution 371-2024, urging passage of the Reentry Assistance Bill S6643A/A9115 at the state level to provide money to individuals upon release from prison.

Presented by

Joseph Soto,
Community Engagement Specialist, Behavioral Health Unit

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Good morning, Chair Nurse, and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Resolution 371-2024, urging passage of the Reentry Assistance Bill S6643A/A9115 at the state level. My name is Joseph Soto, and I currently serve as a Community Engagement Specialist for the Fortune Society's Behavioral Health Unit. I also bring my lived experience of having spent 25 years incarcerated and returning home in 2019.

Fortune is an organization dedicated to supporting individuals transitioning from incarceration and building lives rooted in stability and opportunity, but for many, it begins with fear and uncertainty. When I came home, I had no access to the kind of support this bill would provide, and so I knew I was fortunate to have a community-based organization like Fortune to turn to, but not everyone is so lucky.

The purpose of this legislation is simple and urgent: to provide people returning home from prison with the basic financial resources necessary to survive and start to stabilize themselves during one of the most vulnerable transitions of their lives. The Reentry Assistance Bill proposes a meaningful change requiring the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) to provide individuals with \$425 per month for the first six months following their release. This investment totaling \$2,550 over six months is not only a humane gesture but also a proven public safety strategy. When people are given a real chance to reintegrate with access to food, transportation, hygiene products, and communication tools, they are far more likely to succeed. The current \$200 release stipend, all of which is taken from a person's own account¹, is deeply inadequate. It does not reflect the reality of reentry costs, and it does not reflect a commitment to helping people rebuild their lives. The importance of this bill becomes clearer when we consider what is required of someone coming home today. Upon release, most people must navigate multiple systems immediately, including parole check-ins, medical appointments, job applications, housing searches, and often mental health or substance use treatment. These obligations all require transportation, documentation, and especially digital access. Without a MetroCard or a working phone, people can miss critical appointments, jeopardizing their release conditions and their well-being.

¹ McKenna, C. (2024, May 17). NY would pay ex-inmates \$2,550 after prison under bill to aid transition, curb recidivism. *The Journal News*. <https://www.lohud.com/story/news/politics/albany-watch/2024/05/17/ny-gate-money-bill-would-give-ex-inmates-money-to-help-after-prison-food-rent-expenses/73715712007/>

Moreover, providing people with adequate reentry stipends also yields cost savings. The average cost of incarcerating one person in a New York State prison is a little over \$115,000 per year.² In contrast, modest investments in reentry support, such as this proposed stipend, can significantly reduce reincarceration rates and help prevent homelessness, which also carries a high public cost. In New York City, shelter stays cost an average of \$176 per person per night.³ When individuals fall into homelessness post-release, it puts a financial strain not only on housing services but also on emergency rooms, law enforcement, and public safety resources.

We must also consider the particular importance this legislation will have in the context of racial equity. “People of color remain massively overrepresented in prisons, accounting for nearly 7 in 10 people in prison.”⁴ The consequences of inadequate reentry support fall hardest on communities of color already disproportionately impacted by poverty, over-policing, and systemic barriers to employment and housing. By providing a basic level of support upon release, we are taking one step toward repairing that harm and ensuring people are not punished for a lifetime due to their past involvement in the criminal legal system.

For people like me, this bill would have made the difference between desperation and direction. This is not just about money; it is about dignity. It is about giving people the basic tools they need to rebuild their lives and contribute to their communities. We cannot say we care about public safety and then send people home without adequate support. We cannot say we believe in rehabilitation if we abandon people at the prison gate. I am proud of where I am today, but I also know that my story could have ended differently. Let us make sure others do not have to climb the same impossible hill.

Passing Resolution 371-2024 would send a powerful message that New York City stands behind its returning citizens. It would signal to Albany that we support legislation rooted in data, dignity, and public safety. New Yorkers coming home need more than \$200 and a bus ticket to be successful; they deserve a real chance. We urge the Council to adopt this resolution and join

² USAFacts. (2024, April 17). How much do states spend on prisoners? *USAFacts*. <https://usafacts.org/articles/how-much-do-states-spend-on-prisons/>

³ BUREAU OF BUDGET. (2024). *Comparing per diem hotel and service costs for shelter for asylum seekers*. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/Comparing-Per-Diem-Hotel-and-Service-Costs-for-Shelter-for-Asylum-Seekers-0724.pdf>

⁴ Nellis, A., Pearce, S., & The Sentencing Project. (2024). *Mass incarceration trends*. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2024/05/Mass-Incarceration-Trends.pdf>

the many advocates, service providers, and directly impacted individuals who believe reentry should begin with opportunity.

Thank you for your time and for your ongoing commitment to creating a more just and compassionate New York.



**TESTIMONY OF
THE FORTUNE SOCIETY**

**THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE**

City Hall,
New York, NY

Wednesday, April 16, 2025

SUBJECT: Oversight Hearing

PURPOSE: To advocate for passage of Intro 1100-2024 to expand access to city-funded supportive housing for people leaving jail and prison.

Presented by

Lily Shapiro
Policy Counsel
David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy

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Good afternoon, Chair Nurse, and members of the Criminal Justice Committee. My name is Lily Shapiro, and I am the Policy Counsel in The Fortune Society's David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy. Thank you for the opportunity to emphasize the urgent need for expanding access to supportive housing for justice-involved individuals through the passage of Intro 1100-2024.

For 57 years, The Fortune Society has been committed to breaking cycles of incarceration, homelessness, and systemic marginalization by providing the comprehensive support people need to rebuild their lives. Fortune provides housing, behavioral health services, substance use treatment, workforce development, and more, serving over 13,000 individuals each year. Our housing programs currently provide emergency, transitional, and permanent supportive housing to over 800 people each night. Through our reentry programs, we have witnessed firsthand how stable housing is the foundation upon which people can heal, achieve stability, and successfully reintegrate into their communities. We know that the lack of stable housing impedes people's journeys towards desistance. For particularly vulnerable people who have serious mental illness (SMI), or substance use disorder (SUD), lack of access to permanent supportive housing can force people into a cycle of homelessness and emergency care, draining city resources.¹

Upon intake in Fiscal Year 2024, 22% of our new participants reported being homeless. Thirty-three percent of people entering Rikers are unhoused at the time of admission,² over half of the people detained there have a mental health diagnosis and over 20% have a serious mental illness.³ It is notable that these figures are worse for women on Rikers: 83% have a mental illness and 35% have a serious mental illness.⁴ An analysis of NYC open data conducted as of February 23, 2025 revealed that the average length of stay for a person detained pre-trial on

¹ Corporation for Supportive Housing. (2022). *Advancing Supportive Housing Solutions to Reduce Homelessness for People Impacted by the Criminal Legal System*. Retrieved from <https://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Reduce-Homelessness-for-People-Impacted-by-the-Criminal-Legal-System.pdf>.

² NYC Independent Budget Office. (2024, March). *In Custody: Length of Stay & Population Demographics at NYC Jails, 2014-2023*. Retrieved from <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/in-custody-length-of-stay-and-population-demographics-at-nyc-jails-2014-2023-march-2024.html>.

³ Mayor's Preliminary Fiscal 2025 Management Report. Retrieved from <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2025/doc.pdf>.

⁴ Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform. (2025). *A Path Forward: The Blueprint to Close Rikers*. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b6de4731aef1de914f43628/t/67dd7c6d4e5dca1fa86db6d8/1742568562268/Independent+Rikers+Commission+Blueprint+to+Close+Rikers+Island+March+2025.pdf>.
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b6de4731aef1de914f43628/t/67dd7c6d4e5dca1fa86db6d8/1742568562268/Independent+Rikers+Commission+Blueprint+to+Close+Rikers+Island+March+2025.pdf>

Rikers is now 269 days.⁵ By definition, anyone serving a state prison sentence has been incarcerated for at least one year. Every year since 2015, 41 to 54% of people coming back to NYC from prison have been discharged directly into our city shelters.⁶

Despite the City's stated commitment to supportive housing, its largest program, NYC 15/15, continues to effectively exclude justice-involved individuals by adhering to restrictive eligibility criteria. This exclusion perpetuates the very crisis that the initiative was designed to solve. NYC 15/15 was created to provide 15,000 supportive housing units over 15 years for people experiencing homelessness with SMI and/or SUD. The report issued by city's Supportive Housing Task Force championing the 15/15 initiative noted that supportive housing "reduces the usage of homeless shelters, hospitals, mental health institutions, and jails/prisons."⁷ Ironically, however, because the program follows the federal definition of "chronic homelessness," incarceration for more than 90 days resets the clock on time spent homeless. This policy decision effectively punishes individuals for their incarceration by forcing them into shelters or onto the streets so they can earn more time as "chronically homeless" to qualify for housing. This restriction is not only arbitrary but also actively harmful.

Supportive housing is a critical and proven intervention that helps break the cycles of incarceration, homelessness, and hospitalization by combining affordable housing with services tailored to the needs of people with complex challenges. As emphasized in the recently released report from the Lippman Commission, access to supportive housing is a cornerstone of decarceration and public safety. The report identifies supportive housing as essential infrastructure to close Rikers Island responsibly, asserting that increased investments in it are necessary to ensure people can thrive in our communities rather than cycling through jails,

⁵ Id.

⁶ Coalition for the Homeless. (2024, July). *State of the Homeless 2024: Rights Under Attack, Leadership in Retreat*. Retrieved from <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/state-of-the-homeless-2024/#closing-the-prison-to-shelter-pipeline>.

⁷ New York City's Supportive Housing Taskforce. (2016). *NYC 15/15 Initiative: 15,000 New Units of Supportive Housing over the next 15 years*. Retrieved from [Report for SH Task Force Recommendations.pdf](#)

shelters, and hospitals.⁸ Numerous studies show that supportive housing reduces recidivism, promotes long-term housing stability, and improves health outcomes.⁹

We also know that supportive housing works, specifically in New York City. A long-term study of the Frequent Users Systems Engagement (FUSE) program, a predecessor to justice-involved supportive housing initiatives like Justice Involved Supportive Housing (JISH), found that participants who received housing spent 95 fewer days in jail and 256 fewer days in shelters than those who did not.¹⁰ The cost savings alone are staggering. Providing supportive housing for justice-involved individuals would cost just \$108 million annually, compared to the \$1.4 billion spent to incarcerate them.¹¹ This change represents net savings of over \$1.2 billion for the City,¹² savings that can be reinvested in housing, healthcare, and other social services. This is not just a humane policy; it is a fiscally responsible one.

New Yorkers know that sufficient safe and stable housing is key to public safety and overall community well-being. In the “NYC Speaks” Survey, over 62,000 New Yorkers listed reducing homelessness among their top priorities.¹³ Similarly, the NYC Gun Violence Prevention Taskforce solicited input from over 1500 New Yorkers and representatives of over 20 City agencies. One of the seven key strategies developed in response to this input was expanding access to housing, particularly for people who have been incarcerated.¹⁴

Intro. 1100 would increase the number of eligible applicants without automatically adding new housing units, but this is not unusual; programs like Section 8 operate in the same reality, where eligibility far outpaces availability. Eligibility criteria are not meant to reflect availability; they are about fairness, access, and the opportunity to meet needs. The existence of a

⁸ Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform. (2025). *A Path Forward: The Blueprint to Close Rikers*.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b6de4731aef1de914f43628/t/67dd7c6d4e5dca1fa86db6d8/1742568562268/Independent+Rikers+Commission+Blueprint+to+Close+Rikers+Island+March+2025.pdf>.

⁹ See, e.g., Enterprise Community Partners. (n.d.). *Housing as a Pathway to Justice Toolkit*.

<https://housing2justice.enterprisecommunity.org/housing-and-the-criminal-legal-system>; Burrowes, K. (2019 Feb. 27). *Can Housing Initiatives Reduce Incarceration and Recidivism?*. Retrieved from [Can Housing Interventions Reduce Incarceration and Recidivism? | Housing Matters](#)

¹⁰ Aidala, A. et al. (2023, April). *Fuse 10-Year Follow-Up Report: Initial Findings*. Retrieved from

<https://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/FUSE-10-Year-Report-Initial-Findings.pdf>.

¹¹ Corporation for Supportive Housing. (2022). *Advancing Supportive Housing Solutions to Reduce Homelessness for People Impacted by the Criminal Legal System*. Retrieved from <https://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Reduce-Homelessness-for-People-Impacted-by-the-Criminal-Legal-System.pdf>.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ [NYC Speaks — Talking Transition](#).

¹⁴ *New York City’s Gun Violence Prevention Task Force: A Blueprint for Community Safety*. Retrieved from [Blueprint-Community-Safety.pdf \(nyc.gov\)](#).

waitlist should never be used as a justification to keep people off the list entirely. While any concerns expressed about availability reflect real systemic pressures, they should not be used as a reason to exclude some of the City's most vulnerable people from even being considered for a resource that could be lifesaving. Furthermore, housing developers who want to provide housing to people coming home from jail and prison cannot currently rely on NYC 15/15 as a primary or even secondary funding source, and thus this change in eligibility requirements could spur more development. Passing Intro 1100 is not about overwhelming the system; it is about building a fairer one. The problem is not too many people in need, the problem is too few resources.

The stakes could not be higher. If we fail to act, the City will continue to trap people in a revolving door at a substantial human and financial cost. This revolving door disproportionately impacts Black and Brown communities, who are overrepresented in the criminal legal system, underlining the urgency of systemic change.¹⁵ Expanding eligibility for city-funded supportive housing will provide people with the stability they need to heal, to rebuild, and to thrive. Intro 1100-2024 offers a clear, practical path forward. Let us address the structural barriers in supportive housing head-on, advocate for more units, and create eligibility rules that reflect our values, not our fears. New York City has a choice: continue perpetuating this crisis or take real steps to address it by passing this bill and continuing to explore means of expanding access to supportive housing. We are grateful that every member of this Committee has signed on as a co-sponsor to this critical bill, and we urge you to champion its passage. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your leadership and commitment to making our city a place where all New Yorkers, regardless of their past, can build a stable future.

¹⁵Cadoff, B. et al. (2021, April) "Criminal Conviction Records in New York City (1980-2019)." *Data Collaborative for Justice*. Retrieved from <https://datacollaborativeforjustice.org/work/communities/criminal-conviction-records-in-new-york-city-1980-2019/>.



**The New York City Council
Committee On Criminal Justice
Chair: Council Member Sandy Nurse**

**Oversight – Examining Recommendations from
the Independent Rikers Commission’s Blueprint to Close Rikers
Int 1100; T2025-3381; T2025-3360; T2025-3361; T-3359; Res 371**

Testimony of
The Legal Aid Society

April 17, 2025

Submitted by:

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This testimony is submitted on behalf of The Legal Aid Society, New York City's oldest and largest public defender organization.

The Legal Aid Society is built on one simple but powerful belief: that no New Yorker should be denied the right to equal justice. We seek to be a beacon of hope for New Yorkers who feel neglected—regardless of who they are, where they come from, or how they identify. From our start over 140 years ago, our growth has mirrored that of the city we serve. Today, we are proud to be the largest, most influential social justice law firm in New York City. Our staff and attorneys deliver justice in every borough, working tirelessly to defend our clients and dismantle the hidden, systemic barriers that can prevent them from thriving. As passionate advocates for individuals and families, The Legal Aid Society is an indispensable component of the legal, social, and economic fabric of our city.

Since 1971, Legal Aid has had multiple units, including our Decarceration Project, Prisoners' Rights Project, Incarcerated Clients Services Unit, and our Women's Pretrial Release Initiative (WPRI), dedicated to improve conditions and secure the fundamental human rights of incarcerated individuals within the City jails; from our litigation prompting the closure of The Tombs to systemic oversight of Rikers Island. The most recent Independent Rikers Commission report reaffirms what our Prisoners' Rights Project's litigation has demonstrated, and what our incarcerated clients have reported for decades: the Rikers Island jail complex is unfit for any form of human habitation and has led to the death of 61 New Yorkers since 2020. Its continued operation constitutes a moral failure, a public safety risk, and a fiscal disaster.

Decades of efforts to hold the institution to constitutional standards have made clear to us that Rikers Island is a failed institution, and its closure is a necessity and moral imperative. As stated in the Rikers Commission report, the vast majority of people incarcerated at Rikers are held pretrial — 84% as of February — and remain jailed solely because they cannot afford to pay bail

set in amounts that are legally excessive and ethically indefensible. The overwhelming majority of the people on Rikers have not been convicted of any crime, and there is no need to frame this discussion accepting that at least 4500 New Yorkers who are presumed innocent must be locked in cages at any given time. Nevertheless, the City fosters a culture of iniquity at Rikers Island by subjecting people in its custody to a pattern of degradation and indignity where they are exposed to endemic violence in decrepit, isolated, draconian jails.

The false binary of building new jails to replace the old jails as a solution will always fall short of addressing the systemic racism and public policy failures that create and perpetuate a carceral system in New York City that inflicts devastating and irreparable consequences upon generations of Black, Brown and Latinx people, Indigenous communities, immigrant, low-income and working-class individuals, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people and others who have been historically marginalized. There has been disinvestment in the people held in Rikers Island and criminalization of their communities.

Rikers Island must close by the 2027 legal deadline. The City must finally move away from its reliance on a cruel, antiquated penal colony and decarcerate to reduce the jail population and create the necessary infrastructure and community resources to do so. There must be a divestment in the criminalization and mass incarceration of Black, Brown and Latinx New Yorkers, as well as immigrants, low-income communities, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and others disproportionately targeted by the carceral system. Building a system of public safety based upon an equitable foundation of justice mandates the City to redistribute spending from correctional systems of punishment to systems of rehabilitation and education.

According to the March 2025 Lippman Report, 57% of the current jail population has a mental illness, with over 1,400 people suffering from serious psychiatric conditions. Yet, the availability of treatment or programming for those individuals is scarce. Incarceration is not only

an exceptionally cruel way to treat these vulnerable New Yorkers, but it also makes our communities less safe. While incarcerated, these vulnerable individuals are often treated horrifically, and in many cases, denied medication or treatment, leading to rapid decompensation. The legislature recognized this when it amended C.P.L. 500.10 3-a (f) to allow the court to refer people directly to the hospital for mental health evaluations under N.Y. Mental Hyg. Law § 9.43 and to crisis stabilization centers from arraignments. However, at this time there are no such centers functioning, they are still being developed, and courts seldom choose to send a client to the hospital, despite that being the best place for them to receive the care that they need. As the report stated, the City's jails have become the largest de facto psychiatric facility in the state, a reality that flies in the face of both best practices and basic decency. Rikers is a jail, not a psychiatric facility!

Instead of criminalization, the City must prioritize meeting the needs of those with mental health and addiction issues by providing supportive housing and an expansion of mental health courts in accordance with the recommendations made in the report. In line with the recommendations, the City must expand its use of alternatives to incarcerations, alternatives to detention, and work release programs. The City must invest in transitional housing. The City must invest in rehabilitative, educational, and reentry programming and services for people in custody and provide reentry planning and services. The City must make investments in communities that have been harmed by the use of Rikers. The entrenched culture of xenophobia, racism, transphobia, and other intersecting forms of bias, abuse and secrecy must be replaced by competent, open, and efficient management, in which the people whose liberty is constrained are treated with dignity and respect. Striving for a just and civilized system demands the current culture of impunity, mismanagement, chaos, and dysfunction to be entirely abandoned.

New York City Must Focus on Decarceration

While the Commission's report makes several recommendations, it falls short of grappling with the true drivers of jail incarceration — *Every day in New York City courtrooms, crucial decisions are made that determine whether the New York City jail population increases or decreases*. The reality is that the jail population in NYC will continue to rise as long as prosecutors are requesting, and Judges are setting, excessive bail and failing to utilize non-monetary conditions of release that allow people to remain in their communities while ensuring their appearance at future court appearances.

The City's failure to close Rikers on time is a direct result of its continued overreliance on pretrial detention, its failure to invest at scale in alternatives to detention (ATD) and alternative to incarceration (ATI), and its systemic refusal to treat housing and healthcare as core components of public safety. Public safety begins with fulfilling the physiological needs in the communities.

At Legal Aid, we have found that Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams, Forensic Assertive Community Treatment (FACT) and the City-funded Intensive Mobile Treatment (IMT) Teams to be excellent models of successful stabilization for those we serve. These teams include mental health, substance use, and peer specialists who provide support and treatment, including medication, and facilitate connections to housing and additional supportive services. Currently IMT teams—which are easier to access because they do not require active Medicaid —have capacity for 486 New Yorkers, but the need is much greater. Our social workers at Legal Aid are often faced with extensive waiting lists that create a significant barrier to connecting clients to these services, and too often result in prolonged periods of incarceration. City Council must fund the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to facilitate additional IMT teams and ensure that they operate to provide quality care, as well as further fund the organizations that coordinate ACT and FACT teams, to meet New Yorkers where they are.

Additionally, DOC should use 6A powers to reduce the growing population at Rikers Island. DOC should work to mainstream the process and expand the use of 6A powers as recommended in the report. We support T-2025-3381 and urge the council to require DOC to identify inefficiencies of the 6A early release program and determine how this tool can decarcerate and better serve communities.

Transitional Housing Saves Lives

Every day, as public defenders, we see the cost of the city's failure to invest in communities. It is essential that the City invest in transitional housing, which provides an intermediate step between institutional settings and independent living. Additionally, connecting clients to one of three types of intensive, assertive community-based mental health treatment often means the difference between achieving long-term stability in the community and facing the destabilizing consequences of incarceration while awaiting trial.

Transitional housing gives individuals access to mental health services, stability, and a structured environment where they can rebuild social connections and employment skills and is the most essential piece of discharge planning that leads to long term stability within the community and makes our communities safer.

At the Legal Aid Society, we have successfully utilized our Women's Pretrial Release Initiative's pretrial release advocacy model. The initiative, through community partnerships, and at times, the District Attorney's Office, presents comprehensive bail packages as an alternative to pretrial detention. Clients are supported by transitional housing and community-based programming to close any gaps in services they may need to feel stable and supported to remain safe and productive in the community.

When these services are utilized, when our clients are given access to services and stable housing, our clients thrive. In one instance, we worked with a young woman who was living with

schizoaffective disorder, was stabilized and remained safe only after being released to community-based transitional housing through JusticeWorks. Her success — despite the lack of programming due to electronic monitoring restrictions — illustrates that what she needed was a roof and support, not a cell.

In another instance we worked with a woman who was arrested at eight months pregnant and sent to Rikers. She was released only after we secured her a placement at Providence House. It wasn't until she had safe, stable housing that she could resume mental health treatment and begin the process of reunifying with her infant child. With these supports her family was able to begin rebuilding.

And yet, our hands are tied every day by the lack of available housing. The Women's Pretrial Release Initiative reports that only 23% of their clients have stable housing upon referral to the initiative — and bail applications cannot move forward without it. We are currently stalled on multiple bail applications, not because their client poses a risk of flight to avoid prosecution, but because the City has not provided the housing infrastructure necessary for the court to agree to release them. In order to get people off Rikers, the city council must invest in more transitional housing not only for those who suffer from mental health and substance use disorders, but also those who may not have a diagnosis but need additional support. We support Int 1100, as it will make more beds available for the communities we serve.

Close Rikers Now

If City Council is serious about closing Rikers — and meeting the legal deadline of August 31, 2027 — it must confront the carceral status quo and act decisively to:

- **Pass legislation and allocate funding** to dramatically expand the availability of transitional and supportive housing — not at the margins, but at the transformative scale necessary to house hundreds of individuals that are in dire need of these services

- **Fully implement and expand ATI and ATD programs**, including expanding pretrial release options for judges by fully funding and expanding supervised release with treatment and intensive case management and utilizing electronic monitoring only when truly necessary and in a way people have full access to services and supportive programming.
- **Hold the City accountable** for meeting infrastructure deadlines and begin immediate operationalization of the 500 secure forensic psychiatric treatment beds outside of jail facilities — as proposed in the Commission report — but ensure they are part of a broader commitment to decarceration, not a substitute for it.
- **Pass Int. 1242** which would amend the New York city charter and the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to establishing a coordinator for Rikers Island closure and a coordinator for borough-based jail transition. The Mayor appointed the Deputy Mayor to head the return of ICE to Rikers but has failed to appoint anyone to be in charge of closing Rikers.

If these investments are made today, the Commission’s own projections indicate the City could safely reduce the jail population by 2,300 people — bringing us below the 5,000-bed threshold needed to close Rikers. But without confronting the over reliance on excessive bail that drives pretrial incarceration, without investing in housing, and without real accountability, the new jails will simply become a borough-based version of the same crisis. We will have replicated the architecture of Rikers — just with newer walls.

Closing Rikers is not just a facilities challenge. It is a political one. It requires all of us to reject incarceration as the default and to embrace care, housing, and dignity as public safety strategies for all New Yorkers. This shouldn’t be a difficult ask: pretrial detention is a policy failure. A single day in jail can cost someone a job, housing, or even custody of their children. Per the most recent report, 74% of people released from Rikers go directly back into their communities—

our focus should be on preventing them from going to Rikers in the first place. Investing in our communities *is* public safety.

Thank you for your commitment to closing the humanitarian crisis that is Rikers Island.

**Testimony to the City Council Committee on Criminal Justice
Submitted by Sarita Daftary on behalf of Freedom Agenda
April 16, 2025**

Chair Nurse and Committee Members,

We are grateful to the Council for your commitment to closing Rikers, including through your budget priorities, and holding this hearing.

The defenders of mass incarceration have always tried to convince us that Rikers Island makes us safer. But our members know that Torture Island fuels cycles of violence instead of interrupting them, while sucking resources away from the things that actually work, and their experience is affirmed by the [Independent Rikers Commission report](#). The Commission reiterates that closing Rikers is not only possible, but also urgent and practical, and calls on our city to invest in proven solutions for community safety. The report also asserts that the borough jails can be completed faster, and must be.

We urge the Council to think about our efforts to close Rikers along a spectrum. We should first aim to prevent harm before it occurs and prevent people from reaching a point of crisis. This includes expanding supportive housing, IMT and ACT teams, crisis respite centers, clubhouses, mentoring, and economic opportunity. It is shameful that our city has the resources and proven models to “close the pipelines that feed Rikers,” as the mayor likes to say, but chooses instead to let thousands of our neighbors spiral into crisis, and then sends them to suffer and potentially die in crumbling jails built on decomposing trash. We need to both open more supportive housing units, and make it possible for people to access them when returning from jail and prison, as Intro 1100 would do.

Thinking again about this spectrum - when harm has occurred and an arrest has been made, we need diversion opportunities that protect the presumption of innocence and focus on root causes, like the Treatment Court Expansion Act, and supervised release. We also need multiple forms of accountability, including alternatives to incarceration, which show much better rates of success than Rikers. For example, the Commission reports that only 1 of 115 people released under the 6A program from 2022 to 2024 was readmitted to Rikers, compared to an average 33% of people released from Rikers overall. Instead of expanding the use of this program, DOC is allowing the city jail population and the rate of deaths in custody to soar.

While electronic monitoring and forensic psychiatric treatment beds may be part of the strategy for closing Rikers, they sit on the end of the spectrum that is closest to incarceration, and should not be pursued at the expense of the solutions we just described. In the memo I've attached with our testimony, we outline important guardrails for Council to keep in mind when considering expansion of electronic monitoring and forensic psychiatric treatment beds. Importantly, the Department of Correction should not have any role in the new forensic treatment beds being contemplated.

We also want to mention two current opportunities to address important issues about how the Department of Correction operates – now and in the future – that are referenced in the Commission’s report. The Commission says the maximum number of uniformed officers needed to staff the borough jail system will

be 3,240. We must start rightsizing DOC's headcount now by eliminating their 1,100 vacant positions, and freeing up those resources to invest in the prevention and diversion programs that are so urgently needed to shrink the jail population. Additionally, stronger jail oversight must be part of the strategy to make sure the borough jails operate differently than Rikers. We urge all Council members to join us in advocating for measures to strengthen the capacity, independence, and authority of the Board of Correction as part of the Charter Revision process the Council is currently undertaking.

Below, we outline our support for various pieces of legislation you are hearing today, and suggested amendments.

Intro 1100

- We strongly support this legislation. Jail is not a home, and people returning from jail and prison who would otherwise qualify for supportive housing should not be excluded. The administration's reasoning for opposing this legislation – that it would create additional demand for a limited number of units – is unacceptable. The solution to this problem is for the city to accelerate its work to fulfill its goals for supportive housing development under the 15/15 program, *not* to categorically exclude people who have been in jail or prison for more than 90 days (but would otherwise meet all eligibility criteria for 15/15 supportive housing).

Intro 1238

- We support this legislation. Adequate access to legal documents during incarceration is a big concern among our members.

Intro 1240

- We support this intent of this legislation, and urge the Council to consider how its requirements would interact with Local Law 75-2023, to avoid any duplication of effort

Intro 1241

- We support this legislation. The 6A program has been proven effective, with far lower jail readmission rates than the averages rates for people released from Rikers. It should be used extensively right now as the jail population and rates of deaths in custody have reached crisis levels in the past two months.

Intro 1242

- We support this legislation. Under the previous administration, a senior member of the administration was responsible for coordinating among all of the necessary agencies, and organized monthly meetings with advocates that served as a vehicle for coordination and accountability.

Reso 371

- We strongly support this legislation. The meager \$40 payment issued to people returning from prison has been insufficient for decades. People in the United States already serve the longest sentences in the world, during which their labor is exploited, while they are charged extractive prices for commissary and other goods to supplement the meager food and supplies they receive from DOCCS. We know from experience that direct financial support works, and should be available to everyone coming home, as an investment in their successful reintegration.

Sincerely,

Sarita Daftary

Co-Director, Freedom Agenda

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CLOSE RIKERS

DECARCERATE * DEFEND * DIVEST & REDISTRIBUTE

From: Campaign to Close Rikers Coordinating Committee

Date: April 16, 2025

Re: Independent Rikers Commission 2.0 report

On March 18, the Independent Rikers Commission issued its report, “[A Path Forward: The Blueprint to Close Rikers](#).” **The report reinforces the calls our campaign has made for investment in housing, quality mental health care, and other resources that will not only shrink the jail population but make our communities healthier and safer.** The report also firmly reiterates that reducing the jail population is not only possible, but also urgent and practical, and that the borough jails can be completed more quickly than they are scheduled to be. Overall, the Commission, representing a broad ideological spectrum, reaffirms that closing Rikers is a legal and moral obligation, and must be a priority for any mayoral administration.

Below, we outline our specific responses to the report’s main recommendations, as [summarized here](#).

AREAS OF CONCERN, OR WHICH REQUIRE FURTHER CLARIFICATION

Finding 6: To safely right-size the jail population, stakeholders should urgently

- **Expand pre-trial electronic monitoring capacity.** Electronic monitoring (EM), while almost universally preferable to incarceration, is also a form of carceral control,¹ and one which can extend the sphere of surveillance to family members or other housemates. It should therefore be subject to strict conditions, including:
 - Should only be used for people who could not be released by any other less restrictive means. If EM is to serve the Commission’s stated goal of reducing the number of people in jail, it cannot be used instead to add a level of surveillance to people who might have been released on their own recognizance, under supervised release, or by any other means.
 - Should ensure that rights to seek and attend work, to access education and medical treatment, and to participate in community, family and religious activities are retained.
 - Should, to the greatest extent possible, utilize technology that is inconspicuous and does not contribute to stigmatization of people under supervision in the community.
 - Should be seen as a form of incarceration when paired with house arrest. People who spend time on a monitor with strict restrictions on movement should be given credit for time served.

Finding 8: Expand the borough system’s capacity to 5,000 beds by opening 500 secure forensic psychiatric treatment beds outside the jails

¹ For further recommendations re: electronic monitoring, see [Electronic Monitoring is not the Answer](#), Center for Media Justice, James Kilgore, October 2015.

- People who have been found not mentally fit to stand trial should not be in jail, and are subject to horrific abuse, like deadlocking, when they languish there awaiting transfer to a forensic psychiatric facility. However, aspects of the Commission’s proposal raise questions and concerns.
- In any new facility that is meant to be focused on treatment, there can be no involvement of the Department of Correction (DOC). If DOC has any role, the facility could be licensed as a jail, and operated as a jail, as will be the case with the Outposted Therapeutic Housing Units (OTxHUs) scheduled to open at Bellevue, Woodhull, and North Central Bronx Hospitals. While OTxHUs will be valuable for providing easier access to specialty care for people in DOC custody with acute medical needs, DOC intends to assign 282 staff to the 104 beds in the Bellevue OTxHU, and stated in regard to the design that they “had to make significant changes to design for safety and security...these were originally designed as healthcare facilities.” The models that the Commission cites (Kirby, Mid-Hudson) are run by the New York State Office of Mental Health, with security on-site, but they are not licensed as jails, nor does DOC (nor NYS DOCCS) have a role. However, aspects of the Commission’s proposal raise concerns that there could be involvement by DOC (see below).
- The proposal suggests that people could be housed in these units while a competency assessment (730 exam) is being completed. State law does not permit a person to be transferred to an OMH facility before the completion of a competency assessment, so this raises the concern that some people in the proposed units could be in DOC custody - and therefore, require the presence of DOC. Instead, competency assessments should be sped up, as the Commission recommends. The design of the borough jails, which will have a greater proportion of therapeutic units with on-site medical staff, and with closer proximity to medical staff for general population units, should facilitate quicker completion of assessments. More people with mental health needs who have cases in criminal court should also be diverted to community based treatment, including through passage of the Treatment Court Expansion Act.
- People who are found not competent to stand trial and transferred to an OMH facility are typically returned to DOC custody when their competency is restored, but often decompensate there. Methods to ensure that patients can avoid returning to jail could include remaining at the OMH facility, as the Commission recommends, or on-going care outside of a secure facility, potentially to include residential treatment.
- Existing forensic psychiatric treatment facilities like Kirby (on Ward’s Island), or Mid-Hudson (80 miles from NYC) are difficult to access, have limits on visiting that are similar to jails and prisons, and are very restrictive environments. While there will continue to be some people who need an in-patient setting while they are restored to competence, New York City and State should work to expand utilization of outpatient restoration, which is more widely used in other states.² By doing so, the number of additional forensic psychiatric treatment beds could be reduced, increasing the chance of citing such beds within an existing State facility in New York City.

AREAS OF AGREEMENT

Finding 1: Rikers must close now.

Finding 2: NYC must finish the safer, more effective borough-based system of jails and secure treatment beds asap, and can speed up construction by at least 1 year

² [Competency Restoration: Use of State Hospitals, Community-based, and Jail-based Approaches](#)

- Agree - the City must take all possible steps to expedite construction of the borough based jails, and must also ensure that the designs prioritize the well-being of incarcerated people. Once built, the designs cannot be easily changed, so we must get this right.
- We believe the city could improve on the design of the borough based jails by
 - Reverting to the original planned capacity for each facility (886 beds) with 40% therapeutic units that would all be designed as single tier
 - Ensuring better access to fresh air and outdoor recreation, especially through recreation spaces that are not covered by a solid roof

Finding 3: NYC can and must close Rikers, but will not be able to do so by the legal deadline of August 2027

Finding 4: NYC law mandating closure by 2027 will - and should - remain in place until an agreement can be reached

- Agree. The shameful delay in closing Rikers is the direct result of inaction and obstruction by the Adams administration - including changing the designs of the borough jails to add more beds, which jail contracts explicitly named as a reason for delay.³
- The law remains an important way to hold the administration accountable to closing the Rikers jails as quickly as possible - including transferring vacant land and structures, consolidating operations to facilitate closure of additional jails, and investing in prevention and diversion, and lowering the jail population. It must not be changed without the administration taking these steps.

Finding 5: The Rikers population is artificially inflated beyond what is necessary to ensure public safety

Finding 6: To safely right-size the jail population, stakeholders should urgently [numerous steps outlined]

- Agree, with the exception of the recommendation regarding electronic monitoring, which we believe requires further clarification to ensure it serves the Commission’s stated purpose of reducing the jail population (see above, page 1)
- These measures should have been taken a long time ago, in the interest of public safety and human rights. While delays in the borough jail contracts may prevent full closure of the Rikers Island jails by August 2027, New York City should be able to reduce the jail population to less than 4,000 people by this date, fulfilling one substantial component of the Close Rikers plan.

Finding 7: Reform jail operations and Department of Correction culture now

- Agree.
- The current city Charter Revision Commission process, initiated by the City Council, also provides a crucial opportunity to strengthen jail oversight, which will be essential to achieving and sustaining reforms.
- The previous administration convened a Culture Change Working Group, which the 2019 Points of Agreement promised to continue, but has not met under this administration. This group, and particularly the Subcommittee for Programming, should be reconvened.

Finding 9: To create a safer, sustainable system, the city should phase in investments to fill gaps in treating serious mental illness & addiction, & combat reoffending.

³ In the Queens contract submission (available for review at the Department of Design and Construction), the Design-Builder indicated it took them “a few months” to redesign the facility for 1,040 beds, rather than 886.

- Agree, though we emphasize that these investments are long overdue, and should be made with an urgency that matches that need.
- Though the report does not estimate specific jail population reductions related to these investments, we believe these are the resources that will most effectively prevent crime and reduce incarceration. With these investments in place, we believe the City can plan for a jail population of less than 3,650 people, and revert to the original planned capacity of 886 beds in each of the four borough jails (rather than the current 1,040 beds).

Finding 10: Investing borough-based jails' neighborhoods

- Agree

Finding 11: Start master planning for future of Rikers Island: Renewable Rikers

- Agree

Finding 12: Appoint two full-time senior people to lead

- Agree



Mental
Health
Project

New York City Council
Committee on Criminal Justice

**Oversight – Examining Recommendations from the Independent Rikers Commission’s
Blueprint to Close Rikers**

Wednesday, April 16, 2025
Council Chambers, City Hall, New York, NY

Testimony of
Jennifer J. Parish
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Urban Justice Center Mental Health Project
(646) 602-5644 • jparish@urbanjustice.org

The Independent Rikers Commission makes abundantly clear the moral imperative to close Rikers Island and the urgent need for bold action. The Commission’s blueprint includes critical investments to reduce the jail population, provide healthier outcomes for individuals, and improve public safety. We appreciate that the Commission recognizes that the current overincarceration of people with mental health concerns “artificially inflates [the jail population] beyond what is necessary to ensure public safety,” and we welcome the Commission’s recommendations for targeted investments to decrease the number of people with serious mental health concerns incarcerated. We strongly disagree, however, with the Commission’s recommendation to add 500 secure psychiatric treatment beds outside the jails. We object not only because doing so will increase the capacity of the borough jail system but also because investing in community resources, especially housing, is a much more effective long-term solution. We urge implementation of the Commission’s recommendation to appoint a senior official whose mission is to close Rikers and propose that the official be tasked specifically with reducing and preventing overincarceration of people with mental health concerns.

Introduction No. 1100, which expands eligibility for supportive housing, and **Introduction No. 1242**, which requires the coordinated effort that the Commission recommends, are important for advancing the closure of Rikers. We urge the Council to pass these bills right away.

We also support **Introduction No. 1238**, which will provide incarcerated individuals with increased access to the evidence against them, and **Resolution No. 371**, which calls for the state to enact the Gate Money Program bill. This bill would increase the funds available to people during the first six months after release. Ultimately this measure has the potential to reduce recidivism and reduce the number of people in NYC jails.

The early release (6A) program certainly needs to be evaluated as **Introduction No. 1241** requires; however, we urge that the bill be amended to require the Board of Correction to conduct the study regarding inefficiencies in the program rather than the Department of Correction evaluate itself.

* * *

The Urban Justice Center Mental Health Project advocates for people with mental health concerns involved in the criminal legal system. We are deeply familiar with the difficulties people with mental health concerns who are involved in the criminal legal system have in accessing essential mental health services. We represent the *Brad H.* Class, all incarcerated individuals who are assessed as requiring mental health treatment while in NYC jails. Currently the *Brad H.* Class comprises about 57% of the city jail population, which includes about 1400 people diagnosed with serious mental illness.

Immediate action is needed to divert people with serious mental health challenges from NYC jails. It is unconscionable that New York City holds so many people with significant mental health needs in the inhumane conditions of Rikers Island. This environment is detrimental to the health and safety of this population. Even in the units which are supposed to provide the highest level of mental health care, people with mental health concerns can be subjected to a form of solitary confinement, known as deadlocking, at the whim of correction staff.

Mental Health Investments and Diversion

We strongly support the Commission's recommendations for reducing the number of people with mental health concerns incarcerated through:

- Increasing diversion
 - Expanding and improving treatment courts
 - Expanding alternative to incarceration and reentry programs with a focus on mental health concerns
- Funding additional treatment in the community
 - Opening residential treatment beds for people with co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorders
 - Increasing mobile mental health teams (Intensive Mobile Treatment (IMT), Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), and Forensic ACT)
- Developing more housing options

- Expanding and strengthening supportive housing
- Opening no- to low-barrier emergency housing beds with services onsite
- Adding transitional housing beds with services onsite
- Providing dedicated permanent housing vouchers
- Increasing and improving jail-based services and discharge planning
 - Providing robust jail-based programming
 - Expanding residential drug treatment beds in jails
 - Providing reentry planning and access to services in the community
- Expanding programs to connect people released from arraignments with services

Criminal Case Processing

In addition, implementing the Commission’s recommendation to speed up case processing will also benefit people with mental health concerns as this population is detained on average 70% longer than people without mental health concerns.

Secure Psychiatric Treatment Beds

The Commission’s recommendation to add 500 secure psychiatric treatment beds outside the jails deserves further scrutiny. While the Commission rightly identifies a subset of people with serious mental health concerns who should already be in state Office of Mental Health’s (OMH) custody, far fewer than 500 beds need to be added to move those who have been found not competent to stand trial off Rikers Island.

We completely agree that OMH should take responsibility for individuals found not competent to stand trial, and the Commission is correct to urge immediate action on this front. However, increasing the number of secure psychiatric beds is not the only way to eliminate the backlog of people awaiting transfer out of Rikers for competency restoration. State law permits outpatient restoration, but currently it is infrequently utilized. OMH should develop this option instead of investing solely in the creation of additional inpatient beds. Given that OMH has already planned to add 100 beds, even if the outpatient option is not expanded, significantly fewer than 400 additional beds are needed to ensure that people found not competent to stand trial can be transferred to OMH custody without delay.

Other than those found not competent to stand trial, there is no legal authority for detaining people who are in Department of Correction (DOC) custody in an OMH facility. We recognize that having a secure psychiatric treatment option outside of DOC custody for others in the competency process – those who are undergoing assessments and those who have been restored to competency and are now awaiting trial – could be beneficial, especially in speeding up the resolution of their criminal case. However, until state law is amended to allow for this alternative to DOC custody, there should be no action to create more beds.

Without a law that allows for custody outside DOC control, whatever is built will be another jail. The Outpatient Therapeutic Housing Units (OTHUs) demonstrate that DOC will not step back and allow health staff to take the lead – even when that is the purpose of the unit. Correctional Health Services (CHS) originally planned for the OTHUs to be operated as a true alternative to jail for people with significant medical and mental health treatment needs. However, as those units have been developed, DOC has not been content to have a presence on the perimeter. According to the Commissioner, DOC will staff the Bellevue unit, which can treat a maximum of 104 people, with 282 officers. There is absolutely no reason to believe that any facility which constitutes DOC custody will operate as anything but a jail.

Even more importantly, adding more beds for this population is short-sighted, not just because of the financial cost, which will be exorbitant as psychiatric beds are expensive to operate, but because we will not have established housing, treatment, or any other supports in the community for people after they are released. Just as with the vast majority of other people at Rikers, most of the people who would be held in secure forensic psychiatric treatment beds will return to the community.

Instead of building more beds, removing this population from jail should be the priority, and the Commission's other recommendations, such as expanding access to supportive housing, opening more residential treatment for co-occurring disorders, and creating more ACT and IMT teams, are essential for doing so. The City could also develop innovative combinations of these services which could lead more judges to release people with serious mental illness pre-trial. For instance, specialized supervised release services could include the capacity to access an ACT or IMT team more quickly.

Enacting Intro 1100 would also advance these efforts as currently people with serious mental health concerns who are incarcerated have tremendous difficulty obtaining supportive housing. People who are incarcerated for more than 90 days lose their chronic homeless status and become ineligible for most forms of supportive housing. Intro 1100 requires that this population be included as an eligible population for city-funded supporting housing.

Intro 1242, which will codify the Commission's recommendation regarding the appointment of a coordinator for Rikers Island closure, is a crucial component in reducing the jail population. Having a coordinator who specifically prioritizes decarceration efforts centered on people with serious mental health concerns could result in significant progress in reducing this population. The bill requires an interagency working group that includes Health and Hospitals, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the Office of Criminal Justice. With coordination among these agencies and the courts, especially the treatment courts, there could be increased access to forensic ACT teams or IMT teams and supportive housing for people whom the courts have determined can be diverted, and the court process could move forward much more quickly than it does currently. With the passage of the Treatment Court Expansion Act (S.4547/A.4869),

significantly more people would be eligible for treatment alternatives, and with this coordination, people could be placed in these programs much more quickly.

Implementing the Commission's recommendations about investments for people with serious mental health concerns and expanding on them would be a much more effective way to address the overincarceration of people with mental health concerns than creating another institution which will detain people temporarily and expand the jail population. We urge the Council to continue to support strategies to serve this population in the community rather than embrace this misguided recommendation.



**Testimony Before the New York City Council Criminal Justice
Committee**

April 16, 2025

Voices of Community Activists and Leaders (VOCAL-NY) provides the following testimony in support of the City Council's efforts as they relate to closing Rikers Island.

VOCAL-NY supports Intro 1100, Intro 1242 and Intro 1241 as well as Reso 317.

VOCAL-NY also supports critical investments in this year's budget to provide compassionate care instead of criminalization and incarceration, as detailed below.

Intro 1100 would require the Department of Social Services to include single adults or adult families and families with children where the head of household has a severe mental illness, substance use disorder, or both, is homeless or at risk of homelessness, and has had justice system involvement in the last 12 months to any eligibility parameters for any existing supportive housing program administered and wholly funded by the City.

Eligibility requirements to prove "chronic homelessness" is one of the biggest barriers our members and direct service participants face in trying to access supportive housing.

Intro 1242 would require the establishment of an Office of Coordinator for Rikers Island Closure with a full-time coordinator and dedicated staff that reports directly to the Mayor.

We believe that many of the challenges facing City government would benefit from a single person having the responsibility to address the specific issue, as well as methods to hold that person accountable to the task. While we support the creation of this position, if the Mayor is opposed or antagonistic to closing the jails on Rikers Island, it could create challenges for this role.

Intro 1241 would require the Department of Correction to conduct a study to determine any inefficiencies in the early release program established in accordance with Article 6A of the New York State Correction Law that permits sentenced individuals to be released from jail and serve the remainder of their sentence at home.

In 2024 2,745 people served city sentences in NYC jails, but only 43 were released through the 6A program. Efforts should be made to ensure that all people serving a City sentence are eligible for release through 6A and that the program is utilized to release as many people as possible.

Reso 317 calls on the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign A193/S4078, in relation to providing money upon release for certain incarcerated individuals.

VOCAL-NY supports this legislation and urges the Council to do anything they can to ensure its passage. Additionally, VOCAL-NY supports the proposal within the NYC Council Budget response to set aside \$4.7 million dollars for justice-involved individuals recently leaving incarceration. While supporting the state legislation is productive, anything the City can do alone to ensure that recently released people have access to resources to meet their immediate needs would be helpful.

Additionally VOCAL-NY supports the following investments in this year's NYC Budget, which will support compassionate care and hopefully reduce criminalization and incarceration in the first place.

- Eliminate Care Coordination Waitlists:
 - Increase annual funding for Intensive Mobile Treatment teams by \$22 million
 - Increase annual funding for Forensic Assertive Community Treatment teams by \$7 million
- Expand Supportive Housing Beds:
 - Invest an additional \$4.8 million to expand Justice Involved Supportive Housing (JISH) by 380 additional units
- Fund four new crisis respite centers, two of which must be opened by the end of 2025:
 - At a cost of \$6 million these centers provide 28 days of housing and care for people in crisis
- Add 60 DOHMH staff lines for peer specialists to staff City's non-police mental health crisis response teams:

- o \$4.5 million
- \$9 million for mobile syringe services programs

We believe all of these programs could be funded by eliminating DOC's uniformed vacancies to reflect the reduced jail population, which would save NYC up to \$149.6 million.

Additional background information:

The intersecting issues of homelessness, the overdose crisis, and unmet mental health needs continue to impact an ever-growing number of New Yorkers, causing a humanitarian crisis across New York State that is especially acute in New York City. Politicians continue to lean on rhetoric and policies of criminalization and incarceration, promoting jails and prisons as a public safety intervention, instead of addressing the root causes of these issues through measurable funding and evidence-based policy.

This ideology has continued recently with the NYPD's expansion to respond to "non-emergency, non-criminal" 311 complaints and the expansion of forced removal and hospitalization of people perceived by the NYPD to be mentally unwell. This has not proven to be a helpful intervention and often undermines individuals' effort at stabilization. It's also been used in a racially biased way: a recent report showed that the majority of involuntary transports were of people of color. While just 23% of the City's population is Black, Black people made up 54% of involuntary hospital trips in the past year. [Many people brought to the hospital under the premise of mental health intervention are not admitted, and those that are are often released without any further connection to care.](#)

We urge the Council to reject efforts by the Mayor and Governor Hochul to expand the criteria for involuntary removal by police, which does not address the root causes of mental health and homelessness crises and could divert critical resources away from evidence-based voluntary services that work. We also urge the Council to work with the administration to assign a different, more appropriate agency to this response - one that is staffed with professionals who can actually address any underlying issues.

[188,000 people a year](#) in our state come back to our communities from prisons and jails (about half to New York City) fundamentally destabilized, stigmatized, and uniquely vulnerable. People leaving jails and prisons are at least [129](#)

times more likely to die from a drug overdose the two weeks following their release. And, formerly incarcerated people are 10 times more likely to experience homelessness than the general population. Little is done to ensure people have what they need to thrive upon their return. Instead, tremendous barriers to basic needs have been erected, keeping scarce opportunities for employment, healthcare, and housing out of reach for many.

Since 2020, over 20,000 New Yorkers across the state have died from a *preventable* overdose - 19 New Yorkers everyday - which is likely undercounted because of significant lags and underfunding and staffing in overdose data. Marginalized communities -- low-income, older New Yorkers and Black and brown communities have disproportionately higher rates of overdose. And, overdose remains the leading cause of death for homeless New Yorkers. No corner or community has been spared to this crisis.

On any given night in 2023, 103,200 people across our state are experiencing homelessness. In July 2024, 132,076 people slept in NYC shelters each night. There is no mechanism to accurately estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness who reside on the streets or in public spaces or people living doubled up or tripled up with family members or friends. Rising evictions, voucher discrimination, real estate greed, and lawmakers scapegoating new arrivals for political gain have deepened the homelessness crisis.

With the federal government limiting, or outright cutting, significant resources used to provide healthcare in New York City, it is more important than ever that we are investing in solutions that work, and not putting scarce resources towards interventions that do not actually solve the problems facing New Yorkers.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please contact me by email: nick@vocal-ny.org

WOMEN'S COMMUNITY JUSTICE ASSOCIATION

BEYONDrosie's: imagine Justice, Dignity, and Safety for Women

401 State Street Brooklyn, NY 11217

646.546.8591

WCJA

YOUR

VOICE

MATTERS

Mission:

To help transform systems that oppress and marginalize impacted women and create platforms for women to raise their voices and amplify it.

Executive Director

Rev. Dr Sharon White-Harrigan

Sr Director of Finance & Operations

Keith McCay

Director of Admin & Member Affairs

Tashoy Miller

Director of Rikers & Resources

Rose Harris

Director of Community & Court

Peer Navigation

Akiana Smith

Board of Directors

Carole Eady-Porcher

Connie Temple

Danielle Minelli-Pagnotta

Joan Montach

Kandra Clark

Rita Zimmer

Serena Ligouri

Rev. Dr Sharon White-Harrigan

Rev. Yolanda Johnson –Peterkin

Testimony for NYC City Council Criminal Justice Budget Hearing

Good afternoon, Chair Nurse and members of the Committee. My name is Tashoy Miller, Director of Administrative & Member Affairs at the Women's Community Justice Association, home of the BeyondRosie's Campaign.

The Independent Rikers Commission's *Path to Under 100* report underscores the urgent need to decarcerate women and gender-expansive individuals. It highlights that with targeted investments in diversion programs, supportive housing, and mental health services, we can safely reduce the number of women incarcerated to fewer than 100.

Currently, many women at Rikers are held pretrial, often for low-level offenses, and are primary caregivers. Their incarceration disrupts families and communities, perpetuating cycles of trauma. Diversion and reentry programs tailored to their specific needs are not just beneficial—they are essential.

We urge the Council to fully fund community-based alternatives to incarceration that prioritize women and gender-expansive people, invest in reentry services that address housing, employment, and mental health support and ensure accountability measures are in place to monitor the effectiveness of these programs.

This budget session, like every budget session, we urge you to prioritize alternatives to incarceration and critical resources like supportive housing—but to do so with an eye to which of those programs are positioned to serve transgender people, cisgender women, and families.

One such woman should have been Charizma Jones, one of the unconscionably many people who have died as a direct result of medical neglect and active refusal of treatment on Rikers Island. Diversion would have saved Charizma's life, and the Department of Corrections must be held accountable for her death and the many others avoidable deaths that have occurred under similar circumstances. We urge the Council to prioritize fully funding the Board of Correction and providing it with the means not only to investigate but enforce accountability for travesties like this one. Thank you for your time and commitment.

To Chair Nurse and members of the committee,

My name is Barbara Bierd, and I serve as the Policy and Organizing Associate for the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO). CEO provides immediate, effective, and comprehensive employment services to people returning home from incarceration. As the largest provider of reentry employment services in New York, we support individuals on parole and probation in Albany, Buffalo, Rochester, and New York City — with a focus on those facing the greatest barriers.

On behalf of CEO, we thank Councilmember Hudson for introducing this important resolution. We proudly support the Reentry Assistance Bill referenced in Resolution 371 and want to highlight the powerful evidence behind this investment.

This resolution calls for the passage of a bill that would provide \$425 per month in cash assistance to people under DOCCS supervision for six months following their release for a total of up to \$2,500. The \$2,600 figure is not arbitrary — it comes directly from the design of the **Returning Citizen Stimulus (RCS)** program, a groundbreaking initiative launched by CEO in April 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RCS remains the largest conditional cash transfer to formerly incarcerated individuals in U.S. history, distributing over **\$24 million nationwide**. In New York alone, more than **\$4.3 million** reached **1,700 people, providing monthly payments totaling up to \$2,600**.

Independent research on RCS found that this short-term cash cushion helped participants overcome critical early reentry barriers — such as securing housing, paying for transportation, and covering unexpected expenses. This stabilization reduced the pressures that often lead to parole violations and contributed to **lower recidivism rates lasting up to 18 months**.

Using propensity score matching, the study compared 824 RCS participants with 824 matched nonparticipants from a pool of 8,603 individuals. The results showed:

- Increased full-time employment
- Faster access to stable housing
- Reduced food insecurity
- Higher restitution payments to victims
- Greater spending in local economies on food, transportation, and utilities
- And importantly — **a reduced risk of reincarceration**, saving taxpayer dollars

This isn't just data — it's people. In 2024, New York City's homeless shelters included **1,900 people** recently released from incarceration (City Limits). A 2019 study found that **20% of formerly incarcerated individuals** in New York reported food insecurity — twice the rate of the general

population (Prison Policy Initiative). And more than half of those recently released were unemployed, with just **9% holding jobs that paid more than minimum wage**.

These outcomes are not inevitable. They reflect underinvestment. Currently, less than **1%** of DOCCS's \$3 billion budget is dedicated to reentry programs and services.

Let's put this in perspective: **For the cost of incarcerating just one person at Rikers for a year, we could provide 218 people with \$2,550 in reentry assistance**. Even better — the bill includes an inflation adjustment, unlike today's gate money amount, which was set in the 1970s and hasn't kept up with the cost of living.

We'll close by sharing the story of Shamar Stallworth, a CEO participant and RCS recipient:

“Shortly after release, I became a CEO participant, and they told me about the RCS program. That additional support was everything while I was transitioning back home. I had a job as a cook, but the long hours and low pay made it nearly impossible to improve my situation. Without CEO and RCS, I wouldn't have had anything. I had learned discipline and how to push myself, but starting over was incredibly difficult. I don't know how I would've done it otherwise.”

Today, Shamar works full-time in the nonprofit sector supporting people with disabilities. He describes his job as meaningful and sees, for the first time, a long-term future for himself in his work.

This is what meaningful reentry support looks like.

We thank Councilmember Hudson again for championing this resolution and urge the committee to pass Resolution 371 and call on the state legislature to pass the Reentry Assistance Bill.

Barbara Bierd
Policy & Organizing Associate
Center for Employment Opportunities
bbierd@ceoworks.org

Testimony of Helen Taylor
Committee on Criminal Justice
Oversight Hearing
April 16, 2025

Good morning everyone. I'm so grateful to be here. I left my wonderful, supportive housing apartment to be here with you this morning and I want to share why this apartment is so very important to me. I want to share why other people who have been incarcerated, like me, need to have access to supportive housing.

Having my apartment - the very first apartment I have ever had in my life - has made a difference in my life today because it is a step closer to fulfilling my mission to live a better life. It's not just a place to live. I have a tremendous amount of support and my existence, my humanity is acknowledged. I am a part of a community. There are people that check on me, my birthdays are celebrated, when I had Covid, people went out and brought me groceries, plus so much more.

Getting my apartment and working with such wonderful people at the Fortune Society allowed me to go from hanging out and sleeping in the park, to performing in Shakespeare in the park. Yes, that's right, the Creative Arts department at the Fortune Society connected me with the wonderful people of the Public Theater and the next thing I know, I'm acting on stage at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park with thousands of people watching me every night, when not to long before that, I had to sleep and seek refuge in a public park.

My apartment allows me now to only be in the park when I want to. To perform, to practice, and to sit on the bench and listen to the birds. I am very grateful for this apartment and the people at the Fortune Society. You really saved my life. And I am grateful that I am able to reach out and give back to those who are in the situation that I was in, by advocating for more to people to have access to supportive housing. I hope the City Council will pass Intro .1100 to make sure that this becomes a reality.

My story should not be unique - I contain multitudes- everyone, everyone should have access to supportive housing. Access to the life they want and DESERVE to live. A life of dignity.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.

City Council/Criminal Justice Commission

Closing of Rikers Island

With respect, there is NO reason why Rikers Island is to continue a minute more than is absolutely necessary.

I have worked in Higher Education at Hostos Community College and Bronx Community Colleges of CUNY for 26 years. When a student gets “busted” and assigned anyway to our legal system, they get further traumatized.

Most feel so ashamed and stripped of dignity that they then drop out—even when they are innocent! We all know what happens when a student of color drops out of our fine city college system. They get no decent jobs, and often drift into the ways of crime.

We all know that Mayor Adams, himself a former denizen of the hell-hole that is Rikers, should be sticking to the close of Rikers by 2027—as he promised.

Basta cosi!

I await for the day that the island can be permantly closed for incarceration, and renamed for the former BCC student Kalief Browder, to commemorate his too short life. By all accounts, he was a fine student; but he was picked up for an allegation of petty theft, and was killed in Rikers. We really still miss his presence, his wide-eyed smile, and the bicycle that he drove daily to Bronx Community College. We can ONLY do better—now!

Thank you.

A Sincere Healthy Passover and Holy Week to You and Your Family as we Commemorate another County Jail Resident – Jesus, the Nazarene

Sincerely Yours,

(Rev.) James Francis Sheehan, Jr.; [REDACTED], Bronx, NY 10451 –

[REDACTED] April 14, 2025

Wednesday, April 16th 2025 | 12:00 PM

Chair Nurse and members of the committee,

My name is Joshua Varner. I am justice-impacted, and I'm here in support of Resolution 371.

My involvement with the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision began in 2005 when I made a bad decision. I served three and a half years to pay my debt to society. Upon my release, I was given \$40 — not enough for food, hygiene products, or even train fare. I felt lost. I had no plan, nowhere to go, and no idea how I would make it through the next few days. My thoughts immediately began to spiral back into the mindset that had led me to incarceration in the first place.

If I had received financial support at that moment, I could have focused on rebuilding my life — instead of just surviving.

I was sent to the Wards Island Men's Shelter. Eventually, I was able to reconnect with the mother of my children and move in with her. At first, things were okay — but the added financial burden began to strain our situation. I had to make a choice. I shared my struggles with my parole officer, who referred me to the Center for Employment Opportunities, or CEO — an organization that helps break down barriers for people returning home by providing transitional job opportunities and employment support.

I enrolled in CEO and began working at transitional job sites. While the daily pay helped, it was not enough to meet the needs of my children, our household, and myself. I take full responsibility for my past, but I know my reentry path could have looked very different if I had access to meaningful financial support upon release.

The kind of support this bill proposes — covering basic needs like transportation, job attire, and food — is exactly what returning citizens need to get on stable ground.

In closing, if we want a safer, more just New York, we must move beyond the outdated concept of “gate money” and invest in real reentry support. I urge this committee to pass the resolution and call on the state legislature to pass the Reentry Assistance Bill. When we address income insecurity head-on, we reduce recidivism and improve public safety for everyone.

Thank you,

Josh Varner, Policy/Advocacy Intern
Center for Employment Opportunities
jvarner@ceoworks.org



Good morning.

2 years ago, I was a case manager. I had a client at my shelter who had a lengthy homeless history, until he went to Rikers for a 6-month sentence.

There are categories in the DHS housing system that require chronicity, that means at least one consecutive year of homelessness. My client had 10 years documented homelessness until he served 4 months in jail. Because of the rules about jail being housing, he lost all that credited time. I had to wait about a year again to generate an appropriate packet for him, which was a hardship for him having to stay in shelter much longer than necessary.

I was able to house him after that year, but why should I have? 4 months in Rikers does not constitute being placed into housing, as upon his release from jail he ended up right back where he started, on the street for about a week before we were able to readmit him. So I say, short stays in Rikers does not constitute being permanently housed.

Tommy McInnis Senior Housing Specialist

The Andrews Safe Haven Ph: (212) 497-2607 GV: (917) 410-0895

E-mail: tmcinnis@breakingground.org www.breakingground.org

"It's not who I am underneath, but what I do that defines me."

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Shlomit Levy

Address: [redacted] Brooklyn NY

I represent: Center for Justice Innovation

Address: 520 @more New York NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tanesha Grant

Address: 448 W 143 St

I represent: Parent supporting Parents

Address: Sema

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tasha Burnett

Address: 844 E. 214th St.

I represent: Fair chance Housing/Closing Rikers

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JONATHAN LIPPMAN

Address: _____

I represent: Rikers Island

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

AD

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/05

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: PAUL J. SHERIDAN, Senior Advisor

Address: _____

I represent: Dept. of Corrections

Address: 1500 Broadway, 11th Fl.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

AD

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4-16-25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alex Maldonado, Asst. Commissioner

Address: at Strategic Initiatives

I represent: Dept. of Correction

Address: 1500 Broadway, 11th Fl.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

Ad

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Eduardo Del Valle, Deputy

Address: Commissioner

I represent: DDC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

Ad

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jeanette Merrill, sr AVP of

Address: Communications and External Affairs

I represent: CHS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

Ad

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deanna Logan, Director

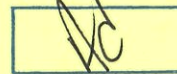
Address: _____

I represent: MOCJ

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1100 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Craig Ritchless

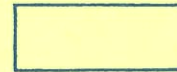
Address: _____

I represent: Human Resources Administration

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 371

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joseph Soto

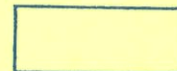
Address: 29-76 Northern Blvd

I represent: The Turkish Society

Address: 29-76 Northern Blvd

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. all Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/15/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jennifer Huse

Address: _____

I represent: The Legal Aid Society

Address: 49 Thomas Street, NY, NY 10013

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

9

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1100 Res. No. 100

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Helen Taylor

Address: _____

I represent: self

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tiana Labrador

Address: _____

I represent: The Supportive Housing Network of NY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1100 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lita Shapiro

Address: 29-76 Northern Blvd

I represent: The Fortune Society

Address: 29-76 Northern Blvd



Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1100 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lauren Velez

Address: _____

I represent: Cooperativa for Supportive Housing

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sarita Dattani

Address: 40 Rector Street

I represent: Freedom Agenda

Address: 40 Rector St

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1241 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DOROTHY WELDON

Address: NYCDS, 100 WILLIAM ST, 20th FL, NY NY 10038

I represent: NEW YORK COUNTY DEFENDER SERVICES

Address: 100 WILLIAM ST

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1241 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christopher W Boyle

Address: 100 William Street

I represent: New York County Records services

Address: 100 William Street

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 371

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brianna Seid

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn NY 11225

I represent: Margherita Center for Justice

Address: 120 Broadway, 17th floor, NY, NY 10271

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Stacy Richards

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 371

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/10/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Barbara Bieid

Address: [Redacted] Queens, 11375

I represent: Center for Employment Opportunities

Address: 50 Broadway New York NY 10004

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 04/16/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ruth Lowenkron

Address: _____

I represent: New York Lawyers for Public Interest (NYLPI)

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LEADERSHIP

Address: 3 COLUMBIA AVE PLATTSBURGH AVE 10530

I represent: RISKY COMMISSION

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

15

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nadia Chait

Address: 4 West 125

I represent: ATI Coalition

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

16

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 371

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/16/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joshua Verner

Address: _____

I represent: Center for Employment Opportunities

Address: 50 Broadway, New York, NY 10014

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

17

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1100 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rebecca Henry

Address: _____

I represent: myself

Address: same

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

18

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christopher Leonard Johnson

Address: _____

I represent: SPV

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

19

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ZACHARY KATZBERG

Address: _____

I represent: INDEP. RIVERS Commission

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

20

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gordon Lee Fmr. Nixon Protester

Address: 2 Saint Pauls Court Brooklyn 11226

I represent: All Groups

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

21

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RITA ZIMMER

Address: _____

I represent: 160th Precinct & WSTA

Address: 125th St 41st Ave 169th Precinct

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

22

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1100-2024 Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jennifer J Parish

Address: 46 Rector St, 4th fl., NY, NY 10006

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sharon Brown

Address: _____

I represent: Rose of Sharon Enterprises

Address: 43 Madison Street 3F

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms