



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

ANTONIO REYNOSO

Brooklyn Borough President

**City Council Committee on Criminal Justice  
Hearing on the FY24 Preliminary Budget 3.23.23**

Good afternoon Chair Rivera and members of the City Council and thank you for holding this hearing today.

I am here today to state unequivocally that this Council and administration must work together to close the Rikers Island jail by the legally mandated date of August 31, 2027. Despite DOC spending more than \$550,000 per incarcerated person per year, the conditions on Rikers are a humanitarian crisis. One death of an incarcerated person is too many; and 19 in one year last year, with yet another just last month, is a crisis that we must address with great urgency. Yet instead of moving us toward decarceration, the proposed FY24 DOC budget funds \$2.744 billion worth of the same broken system.

The most egregious spending is on staff salaries, benefits, and overtime. While I believe that these officers deserve fair wages, the over-staffing due to abuse of sick leave and reassignment of officers to non-jail duties needs to end. DOC's staffing ratio continues to hover near one officer for every incarcerated person, far exceeding the national average, yet the department also blows past its projected overtime spending every year. In a fiscal climate where we are debating cuts to essential City services like libraries, we absolutely must get this inflated spending under control. Eliminating vacant positions at DOC (as the Mayor is calling on other agencies to do) alone could provide the City with \$119 million (\$221 million if we take into account anticipated attrition) to reallocate to programs that support a future with a much smaller incarcerated population, without a jail on Rikers Island.

Some of these programs include:

- **Supportive housing and behavioral health programs:** About 50% of incarcerated people on Rikers Island at any given time have a mental health diagnosis, and thousands are homeless. We absolutely cannot keep using our jails in place of community-based treatment programs and affordable housing opportunities. The Mayor's office estimates that hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who could benefit from behavioral health treatment programs are not connected to care, and notes that there are racial and geographical disparities in access. The budget should reallocate funding from DOC staffing to community-based behavioral health programs targeted to the neighborhoods with least access to care. I also support advocates' call for reallocation of \$57.8 million of DOC's budget to fund creation of new supportive housing, providing

those in need with permanent homes and supplemental treatment and support services that improve outcomes and reduce recidivism.

- **Investments in youth:** Among its many recommendations, the Commission on Community Reinvestment and the Closure of Rikers advocated for investments in youth programs, including after-school, sports and STEM initiatives, adolescent skills centers, and summer jobs, as well as Cure Violence organizations that host youth prevention programs, teen relationship abuse prevention programs (RAPP), and Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs (HVIPs).
- **Alternatives to incarceration and faster trial:** Recent analysis by MOCJ has shown that many more people than are currently receiving it could benefit from supervised release. Expanding this and other ATI programs will help us safely reduce the jail population so that we can close Rikers by 2027. Another crucial step is to sufficiently fund programs and staff needed to reduce the time between arrest and trial, such as the Center for Justice Innovation's pilot program that significantly reduced felony case delays in Brooklyn.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing today. I very much appreciate the Council's leadership in the efforts to close Rikers, and I look forward to working with Speaker Adams, Chair Rivera, and the rest of the Council to ensure that we keep our commitments made to New Yorkers to end the injustices and neglect at Rikers and to reinvest our public dollars into supporting our communities, not incarcerating them.