

June 20, 2023

Dear Hon. Mayor Adams and City Council Speaker Adams,

We represent organizations throughout the City who serve thousands of individuals, families, and children across diverse fields including legal, reentry, mental health, substance use, employment, housing, and beyond. We are alarmed by the unexpected decision to cut \$17 million from the NYC Department of Correction (DOC) FY24 budget for supportive programming in our city jails. **We implore you to restore this funding for the 6 contracted program providers.**

Programs in our city jails on Rikers Island and the Vernon C. Bain Center (VCBC) are run by Greenhope Services for Women, Fedcap, The Fortune Society, Osborne Association, SCO Family of Services, and the Hort, highly regarded non-profit organizations with a history of success. Together these providers ensure thousands of people receive critical services, including cognitive behavioral therapy, employment readiness, conflict avoidance, and reentry preparation. DOC's proposed total FY24 budget of \$1.17 billion<sup>1</sup> includes over \$110 million allocated for vacant staff positions.<sup>2</sup> **Cutting only 20% of DOC's funded vacancies would more than fully fund all of the programs being eliminated.**

The programs DOC is planning to eliminate are associated with safer and healthier environments within jails, increased connection to programs and positive resources, and successful reentry. The importance of programming extends far beyond those who participate on Rikers and at VCBC: their children, families, communities, and we as a City are all safer and far better off when people in jail have access to services and opportunities to heal, grow, and transform. Program providers are trained, passionate professionals who provide quality services in less than ideal circumstances, bringing real skills, hope and motivation to people at a very uncertain, destabilizing time in their lives. Program providers work with the more than 50% of people on Rikers with mental health diagnoses, and with the majority of people on Rikers who have experienced childhood trauma and/or victimization. Programs in our jails must be considered essential services and protected as such.

### **Programs Promote Public Safety**

The slated reductions counteract Mayor Adams' commitment to public safety. These programs - currently provided by 90-plus staff who are now at risk of losing their jobs - serve approximately 1,700 individuals

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<sup>1</sup> See [here](#)

<sup>2</sup> Analysis provided by the Campaign to Close Rikers: "The Department of Correction had [399 vacancies](#) for uniformed staff in March 2023. # [Reducing uniformed positions to 6,661 to eliminate these vacancies could save at least \\$110.2M.](#) # Taking into account average attrition rates, DOC's vacancies for uniform staff will likely increase to 700 by the end of the fiscal year. [Reducing uniformed positions to 6,360 to eliminate these vacancies could save \\$193.4M.](#) Certainly, this is the measure to cut DOC spending that should be taken instead of cutting \$17M to contracted discharge planning providers. DOC could find \$17M in savings by instead cutting 60 of its current vacancies."

*daily* across 179 housing units and are instrumental in reducing violence and recidivism, which is crucial to fostering safer communities. The programs promote safety for those who work in our jails as well as for those who are held there. The cuts will particularly impact 18 mental health observation units for individuals with severe mental illness and 7 units for individuals in protective custody, increasing isolation and exacerbating already inhumane conditions.

Program cuts will have devastating effects on incarcerated individuals. These services provide motivation, rehabilitation, connection, and hope, reducing violence and tension inside the facility. Removing this support risks increasing idleness, despair, and conflict.

### **DOC's Proposed Plan is Not Feasible**

DOC is required by law to provide five hours of programming daily. While they claim they will be able to assume program responsibilities on July 1 and meet this mandate with existing staff, this is hard to imagine based on repeated assertions of staff shortages and the testimony by Deputy Commissioner Francis Torres before the City Council on May 19 that these proposed new duties for DOC staff are outside of current work scopes. The latter means that staff's Tasks & Standards (job duties) will need to be changed and must be approved by the union, a process that can take weeks or months. DOC has also shared that they have more than 50 vacant positions in their programs area, and their hiring and clearance process takes several months. With DOC's proposed plan, an extended period without programming, at best, seems inevitable and could have dire consequences, including DOC being out of compliance with the law requiring 5 hours of programming per day.

Additionally, the services that providers offer require training, preparation, and cultural competence that existing DOC staff do not have time to put in place before July 1. DOC's assertion that they can seamlessly assume these new responsibilities by July 1 reflects an underestimation of the skills and experience necessary to engage the population. DOC program staff currently provide mainly recreational activities as a complement to the evidence-based therapeutic interventions offered by the service providers. Many current program provider staff are formerly incarcerated, themselves, and thus, are uniquely qualified to create connections based on trust and relatability which is enhanced by their independence from DOC. In contrast, DOC staff - including those not in uniform - are seen and experienced by incarcerated people as part of the DOC system of custody and jail management, and not as trusted, well-known providers offering opportunities for growth. This will not increase participation and engagement but instead will decrease both, while also diminishing hope and creating the conditions for a

potential uptick in violence. DOC simply cannot reproduce the same level of engagement and services that community providers offer.

### **Programs are a Matter of Racial Justice**

Since 94% of people incarcerated in our city jails are Black and brown, and the majority of program provider staff are people of color, eliminating programming and the jobs of program providers further exacerbates systemic racism and inequity.

### **Accountability for Spending**

We recognize DOC is required to find budget cuts, but it is important to note there are much easier ways to save money than by eliminating critical services:

- just one month of DOC overtime costs \$21 million (more than the entire budget being cut for 6 program providers serving thousands for one year);
- cutting DOC vacancies could save \$110.2 million alone;<sup>3</sup>
- according to the Nunez Federal Monitor, more than 1,000 Officers were chronically absent as of October 2022, receiving millions of dollars in salaries while not coming to work<sup>4</sup>;
- last year, DOC paid out \$53 million to detainees wrongly held in solitary confinement, and is poised to pay out up to \$300 million in a bail class action settlement.

### **Concern for Transparency**

In the past months, the public's access to knowing what is going on within the walls of Rikers has been reduced. Starting with DOC limiting the video access of the NYC Board of Correction, and most recently with DOC announcing they would no longer report on deaths in custody, the elimination of program providers is particularly concerning because it also further isolates people in custody and staff, and reduces public transparency. Rikers is a place in need of light, not increasing darkness and all the harm this brings and allows.

DOC's proposed solution is a short-sighted response that lacks a realistic implementation plan, will not produce desired outcomes, and is counterproductive to successful reentry and public safety. **We emphatically and urgently call on you to restore this critical funding to the FY24 budget.**

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Freedom Agenda: "In order to calculate savings, we totaled the cost of personnel services (\$1 billion), fringe benefits (\$887 million), pensions (\$533 million) for the Department of Correction, and then calculated the per personnel cost of staff based on 8,790 full time equivalent (FTE) staff, which yielded a per-personnel cost of \$276,289. Mayor's Office of Management and Budget, "Preliminary Budget Fiscal Year 2024, Expense Revenue Contract."

<sup>4</sup> Martin, Steve J et al. "Second Status Report on DOC's Action Plan by the Nunez Independent Monitor." October 28, 2022. p53.

Sincerely,

*A Little Piece of Light*  
*A More Just NYC*  
*American Friends Service Committee*  
*Acacia Network*  
*Both Sides of the Violence, Inc.*  
*Brooklyn Community Housing & Services, Inc.*  
*Brooklyn Defenders Services*  
*CASES*  
*Center for Community Alternatives, Inc.*  
*Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)*  
*Center for Justice Innovation*  
*Children's Defense Fund- NY*  
*Children's Haven: A Place of Healing and Hope, Inc.*  
*Children's Rights*  
*Citizens Against Recidivism, Inc.*  
*Citizens' Committee for Children of NY*  
*Coalition for Homeless Youth*  
*Coalition for Women Prisoners*  
*Columbia University- Office of Government & Community Affairs*  
*Community Connections for Youth*  
*Community Service Society of New York*  
*Community Voices Heard*  
*Congregation Beth Elohim*  
*Corporation for Supportive Housing*  
*Correctional Association of NY*  
*EAC Network*  
*Echoes of Incarceration*  
*EndQiNY*  
*Esperanza NY, Inc.*  
*Exodus Transitional Community*  
*Freedom Agenda*  
*Fortune Society*  
*Good Shepherd Services*  
*Grace Church, Brooklyn Heights*  
*Granny Peace Brigade*  
*Greenwich House*  
*Henry Street Settlement*  
*Hour Children*  
*Housing Works, Inc.*

*Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison*  
*Incarcerated Nation Network*  
*Jails Action Coalition*  
*JCCA*  
*JustLeadership USA*  
*Just Write, Inc.*  
*Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice*  
*KHN Consulting, LLC*  
*Kings Against Violence Initiative*  
*Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church*  
*Legal Action Center*  
*Long Island Social Justice Action Network (LISJAN)*  
*Mentor on the Move 4Life, Inc.*  
*Mott Haven Reformed Church*  
*Music on the Inside, Inc.*  
*Mutual Aid Immigration Network*  
*NAMI Huntington*  
*National Action Network NYC Chapter*  
*Second Chance Committee*  
*National Action Network*  
*Neighbors in Action*  
*Neighborhood Coalition for Shelter, Inc.*  
*Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem*  
*New Hour for Women and Children*  
*New Jersey Reentry Corporation*  
*New York City Employment and Training Coalition*  
*New York County Defender Services*  
*New York Jewish Coalition for Criminal Justice Reform*  
*New York Immigration Coalition*  
*New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents*  
*New York Lawyers for the Public Interest*  
*New York Progressive Action Network*  
*New York Theological Seminary*  
*NYC Justice Peer Initiative*

*NYCDS Mental Health Unit*  
*Osborne Association*  
*Peer Network of New York*  
*People's Police Academy*  
*Presbytery of New York City Justice Ministries Committee*  
*Prison Families Alliance*  
*Prophetic Whirlwind Fellowship*  
*Providence House, Inc.*  
*Queens Defenders*  
*Raging Grannies*  
*Release Aging People in Prison/ RAPP Campaign*  
*Restorative Justice Initiative*  
*Rikers Public Memory Project*  
*Rise and Resist NY*  
*RiseBoro Community Partnership*  
*SCO Family of Services*  
*Service Program for Older People (SPOP)*  
*Shape Consulting, Inc.*  
*Silent Cry, Inc.*  
*Social Justice Committee of the UU Congregation at*  
*Shelter Rock*  
*St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Harlem*  
*St. Peter's Chelsea*  
*Staten Island Inter-Religious Leadership*  
*Supportive Housing Network of NY*  
*The Ali Forney Center*

*The Bronx Defenders*  
*The Church of Gethsemane*  
*The Gathering for Justice*  
*The Health & Housing Consortium, Inc.*  
*The Interfaith Center of NY*  
*The Legal Aid Society*  
*The New Shul*  
*The New York Zero to Three Network*  
*The New York Women's Foundation*  
*The People's Plan NYC*  
*The Pinkerton Foundation*  
*Trinity Church Wall St.*  
*T'ruah: the Rabbinic Call for Human*  
*Rights*  
*United Neighborhood Houses*  
*Uptown Progressive Action*  
*Urban Justice Center*  
*Urban Pathways*  
*Vera Institute of Justice*  
*Volunteers of Legal Service*  
*V-Day*  
*WellLife Network Inc.*  
*Women & Justice Project*  
*Youth Justice Network*  
*Youth Represent*

Cc:  
Executive Deputy Mayor Sheena Wright  
Deputy Mayor Philip Banks, Public Safety  
Commissioner Louis Molina, NYC Department of Correction  
Councilmember Carlina Rivera, Criminal Justice Committee  
Chair