

A MORE JUST NYC

Independent Commission on NYC Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform

Testimony of Zachary Katznelson, Policy Director City Council Budget Hearing, March 22, 2021

Good afternoon. I'm Zachary Katznelson, Policy Director of the Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform, often known as the Lippman Commission after our chairperson Judge Jonathan Lippman. Thank you for the chance to testify.

We all know we need better management and more accountability throughout the Department of Correction. The triple shifts are one piece of that. Aside from the mismanagement and the fact that 1200 officers call in sick every day, a worrying number which deserves further examination, the layout of Rikers requires staffing assignments that proper jails would not. Yet another reason we have to move into rebuilt borough facilities as soon as possible.

But before then, we have to start changing the way the jails operate – and are funded. For instance, the *Nunez Monitor* has repeatedly criticized the Emergency Services Unit, the riot squad of the jails, for exacerbating and driving violence – in significant part because it deploys too many officers. Yet, the proposed budget continues to fund the unit at the same inflated multi-million dollar level.

Outside the budget, the Council should reform civil service rules so wardens can be hired from outside DOC. The current requirement that jail leadership be hired solely from within has left the Department with too thin a bench.

We agree that the Board of Correction is central to efforts to remake the way DOC operates – and it cannot do its job effectively when it gets a tiny fraction of DOC's budget. The City should double or even triple BOC's budget.

More broadly, we need to continue to do all we can to subject as few people as possible to the utter dysfunction of Rikers. Now is the time to double down on what we know works, both to reduce the violence that has risen in certain neighborhoods during COVID – and to stop people from entering the criminal system in the first place. Invest in intensive youth intervention, violence interruption, community-based mental health treatment, and supportive housing. These are proven to directly reduce crime and violence – and far more effectively and far more cheaply than Rikers, which in turn is proven to be criminogenic, damaging, and beget yet more violence. This kind of community-centered investment was central to our City's success over the past two decades driving down crime AND incarceration. Is it any wonder that when COVID disrupted that service delivery, we saw things head the other way? Let's get back on the right path and help our City do even better.

Thank you.