

# A MORE JUST NYC

## Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform

### Testimony of Peter Samuels for City Council

September 5, 2019

My name is Peter Samuels and I am here today to speak in support of the plan to close Rikers Island.

I am on the boards of the FedCap Group and Argus Community, Inc., organizations that provide social services to underserved communities in New York City. I am also a member of The Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform, commonly known as the Lippman Commission.

It did not take our Commission long to conclude that the Rikers jails are irredeemable, and that Rikers is emblematic of much deeper issues in our city and its criminal justice system – far too many people are incarcerated, almost 90% of whom are people of color, and most people who are incarcerated have a mental health diagnosis or substance use issue.

New York City can and must hold far fewer people in jail. The push to close Rikers from the administration and City Council have already accelerated a process of decarceration that has resulted in 2,500 fewer people in jail over the past two and a half years, while crime continues to drop to historic lows. In other words, fewer people in jail has not increased crime, just the opposite.

The four borough facilities that are under consideration now are a necessary path to put an end to Rikers. Safer facilities, closer to courthouses and family members, equipped with proper space for medical care, therapeutic programming, and re-entry services will facilitate more opportunities for success when a person is released from jail. That is the right and humane thing to do, and it will ultimately improve public safety.

Our commission projected that a drastically smaller system of detention would save our city more than a billion and a half dollars each year, far exceeding the cost of building borough facilities and enabling long term investments in other areas.

Every day Rikers is still open is a day New Yorkers are being harmed. If we as New Yorkers fail to act now, fail to seize the moment, the very real risk is that we will lose the chance to close Rikers Island for many years, maybe forever. Please vote in support of this plan to close those jails as fast as possible.

Thank you.