

**Testimony before the
New York City Council
Committee on Criminal Justice
Chair Carlina Rivera
By
Kat Thomson, Chief of Staff
NYC Department of Correction**

September 29, 2023

Good morning, Chair Rivera and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice. I am Kat Thomson, Chief of Staff for the NYC Department of Correction (“Department” or “DOC”). I am joined today by the Deputy Commissioner of the Division of Programs and Community Partnerships (“Division” or “Programs”), Francis Torres, and Assistant Commissioners Nell McCarty and Valerie Greisokh to provide an update on the Department’s programs and reentry services since insourcing large contract services as part of the Fiscal Year 2024 Adopted Budget.

Division of Programs Overview

We believe that everyone benefits when individuals in custody are afforded the tools that they need to have less adverse contact with the justice system in the future. To this end, individuals in the Department’s care can access an array of robust services and opportunities that support change and successful community reintegration. Most of these services are afforded by the Department through Programs staff, including arts, enhanced recreation, law library, chaplaincy, social services, and individual and group-based counseling. Staff assigned to the

Division of Programs and Community Partnerships also lead community-engagement days, conduct family interventions, and respond to some emergencies within the jails to assist in de-escalating or problem solving with people in custody. In addition to these core services, the Department of Education provides education in schools, and volunteers afford all kinds of enrichment activities.

The Division of Programs is comprised of a highly skilled and dedicated group of individuals who do tremendous work in the jails every day. All Programs staff are trained in evidence-based curriculum and best practices, and continue to participate in ongoing training and development throughout their careers at the Department. They bring a wealth of diverse skills, experiences, and perspectives to their work. On average, Division staff have worked for the agency for seven years, with nearly 80 percent holding higher education degrees ranging from Associates to Doctoral Degrees. Many of these staff members started their careers with community-based organizations, and several, including senior staff members, also have lived experience within the justice system and with issues that can impact justice involvement. Their work is critical to the Department's goals of building safe and humane jails, and preparing individuals in custody for a successful return to their community.

Programs Insourcing Update

As this body is aware, in order to comply with the Mayor's mandated four percent budget reduction in the Fiscal Year 2024 Adopted Budget, the Department terminated large contracts with external program providers and insourced the services they were providing. The primary role of external providers under these contracts was to afford group-based services on the

housing units, in addition to the core services afforded by DOC Programs staff. The Department has implemented several strategic measures over the last few months to ensure individuals in custody continue to receive robust and meaningful programs and services in the absence of these contracts.

Since 2015, our Counseling Unit staff have been the primary staff leading group facilitation within certain housing areas, including our Adolescent and Emergent Adult units and most recently our Enhanced Supervision Housing units. Because of this, they were well positioned to assume these responsibilities Department-wide once the contracts ended. Between May and June of this year, we engaged with labor union leadership to change the tasks and standards for Associate Correctional Counselors within the Counseling Unit so that they could provide group-based counseling services for the whole population. These changes required a shift in some of their other responsibilities. Prior to implementing any changes for our staff, we held internal meetings with staff to provide transparent information about upcoming changes. Individuals in custody were also informed of the transition of group facilitation and one-to-one counseling by contracted providers to Department Counseling staff members. Staff were provided with refresher trainings on facilitation techniques, evidence-based practices, and curricula to ensure they were prepared to assume these responsibilities.

Of course, we knew we could not simply ask our Associate Correctional Counselors to take on more responsibilities without creating efficiencies and shifting responsibilities in other areas. Previously, Associate Correctional Counselors were providing most services in a one-on-one format. Under the new model, Associate Correctional Counselors provide people in custody with the same frequency of programming, just now in a group format; the goals of counseling sessions

have not changed but rather broadened to incorporate a group experience. Individuals still have access to one-on-one engagement through various other Programs staff and activities, such as chaplaincy services, enhanced recreational services, and the fine and performing arts team. We have also shifted the way in which social services are accessed and supported. Social service requests can now be submitted through the tablets, and we recently onboarded five Supervising Counselors who are supporting the provision of social services across each jail. These operational changes have reduced the workload related to social service requests for the Associate Correctional Counselors, allowing more time for the provision of group services. Furthermore, this month the Counseling Unit welcomed a new Deputy Director to provide additional support and guidance to the team; a second Deputy Director will join the team in October. Lastly, I would like to highlight that NYC Health + Hospitals/Correctional Health Services (CHS) remains a partner and the only provider of mental health therapy and counseling for those in custody. For issues that are beyond the scope of the Division of Programs, DOC continues to partner with CHS through referrals to mental health services.

The Department continues to partner with the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice ("MOCJ") and contracted reentry providers to afford transition planning for individuals in our care. Transition Coordinators meet with incarcerated individuals to assist with discharge planning and make referrals to community-based services, including assistance with housing and employment. They also assist individuals who are transitioning to state prison by providing them resources and information about the transfer process and the services available upstate. On September 15th, we launched a new tablet feature enabling incarcerated individuals to connect directly with Transition Coordinators if they need assistance with transition planning. Our goal is to ensure

that everyone has the resources and support they need to prepare for their next step. The Department's reintegration services are designed to address individuals' specific needs and we proudly partner with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the NYC Department of Veterans' Services to afford tailored services to the Veterans in our care. We also partner with organizations such as the Women's Prison Association and the Women's Community Justice Association to afford services designed specifically for women, and we work closely with Youth Justice Network and SCO Family of Services to support emerging adults. In addition, we continue to release eligible sentenced individuals through the Article 6A Work Release Program. Since the beginning of this administration, we have released 67 individuals, 90 percent of which successfully completed the remainder of their sentence in the community. Finally, I will emphasize that the reentry services provided by contracted providers have not changed. These contracts are held by our partners at the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice ("MOCJ") and were not impacted by the Department's in-sourcing.

I would like to highlight that, despite this shift in operations, individuals in custody continue to have access to a majority of programs and services in the same manner as they were previously afforded. Not only have we continued to provide high quality programs and services through this transition, we have also continued to expand certain program areas and implement new initiatives. We have strengthened and expanded substance use and addiction programming and housing areas, as well as faith-based services. We also continue to strengthen visitation programs, so that parents can maintain important family ties and meaningfully engage with their children. The Department partners with the Children's Museum of Manhattan ("CMOM") to facilitate family visits between incarcerated parents and their children in the community.

Recently, the Department worked with CMOM to bring some of their exhibits to DOC visit houses to provide children and families with interactive activities and experiences for bonding in the visit areas. The Department also launched a new partnership with the Twinning-Project, which teaches soccer to incarcerated individuals to promote teamwork, physical activity, and physical health. This month and next month, we will integrate other providers as part of our advancement and enrichment opportunities to include our robust menu of workforce development's certificates and certifications. It is our goal to continue expanding and refining services offerings through conversation with people in custody and critical partnerships with community-based organizations.

Preconsidered Legislation

Now I will briefly turn to the proposed legislation, Int. 1203. The bill would require the Department to provide a letter of incarceration, also known as jail release papers or discharge papers, to every person that gets released from the Department's custody. The Department recognizes that letters of incarceration can be helpful in obtaining identification or other services and benefits after release to the community, and currently provides letters of incarceration to individuals upon request. With current resources and operations, it may be challenging to provide letters of incarceration upon release for all people in custody. Nonetheless, the Department appreciates the intent of the proposed legislation and looks forward to discussing this bill further with Council.

Conclusion

We recognize that this fiscal year brought about a major shift in the manner in which the Department affords some programs and services. There were certainly challenges, which is to be expected with any major shift in operations. However, over the past 20 months, this Department has demonstrated that we are willing and able to face challenges head-on and come to thoughtful solutions that serve the people in our care. We owe much of our success to our amazing Programs staff and their dedication throughout this transition.

Thank you for the opportunity to share about the great work of our Division of Programs and Community Partnerships, we are available to answer your questions.

**New York City Department of Probation
Testimony to the New York City Council
Committee on Criminal Justice
September 29, 2023**

Good Morning Chair Rivera and members of the Criminal Justice Committee. I am Juanita N. Holmes, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Probation (DOP). With me today is Deputy Commissioner Robert Maldonado,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Council about our programming. The Department of Probation helps build stronger and safer communities by working with and supervising people on Probation, with the hopes of fostering positive change in their decision-making and behavior through research-based practices and by expanding opportunities for them to move out of the criminal justice system through meaningful education, employment, health services, family engagement and civic participation.

Probation serves as the largest and most robust community corrections alternative to incarceration in New York State and is one of the largest Probation agencies in the nation. DOP is committed to ensuring that the people under its supervision have access to the opportunities and services they need, to not just avoid incarceration, but to thrive!

Currently, the New York City Department of Probation supervises approximately 14 thousand clients. Juvenile Operations accounts for approximately 600 clients, and Adult Operations accounts for over 13 thousand clients.

Six months ago, upon my appointment the Mayor gave me my marching orders "reduce recidivism", which resulted in my assessment of the agency's staffing needs, (policies and procedures),(client services and programs).

Currently DOP has 53 programs with approximately 27 service providers. Some of which are supported by our NeON spaces, which means we not only provide programs for our clients but also offer programming to community members. Programming includes mentoring, work readiness, parent support coaches, NeON Arts, financial literacy and more.

My job as Commissioner is to make sure we have robust programming and evaluating the effectiveness of outcomes. At DOP we take that very seriously. It was determined that some of the service providers key performance indicators do not completely support successful outcomes.

DOP has begun revising performance indicators that will be required of current and future service providers moving forward.

In addition to our supervision of clients, what is going to help reduce recidivism is literacy and employment. DOP has recently contracted with a CDL training provider, as well as the Department of Transportation who provided job opportunities for our clients, particularly those over the age of 24, which accounts for a large percentage of our population. We are also seeking programming for our LGBTQIA+ clients and our clients with special needs.

The Department of Probation and the Department of Education are scheduled to meet on October 12, 2023 for the first time to discuss under credited clients and pathways forward. Also, we have reinstated our Bronx High School Equivalency program, in addition to onboarding an educational tutoring program.

Moving forward we remain steadfast and committed to using a combination of prevention and intervention, along with community-based programming that actually helps bring positive change to our clients and the community.

I would like to thank the City Council for their partnership and continued support in keeping the city safe.

This now concludes my testimony, and I am open for questions.



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

**STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE
SEPTEMBER 29, 2023**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chair Rivera and the members of the Committee on Criminal Justice for holding this hearing.

In Fiscal Year 2022, there were 17,803 admissions to the jail on Rikers Island.¹ With an average length of stay of 120 days, the vast majority of these people will be released back into their communities. The average daily population was 5,559, meaning that many of those who were released from Rikers returned in the same year. Incarceration, no matter the length, is a stressful and destabilizing experience. Those who have been incarcerated are unemployed at a rate of over 27 percent, and are ten times more likely to experience homelessness than those who have never been incarcerated.²³ It is our responsibility to ensure that people released from city jails have the support and services they need to successfully reintegrate into their communities and do not return to jail.

New York City is not on track to close Rikers Island by 2027. The city forecasts that the jail population will increase to 7,000 by next year, but the four proposed borough-based replacement jails together cannot house more than 3,300 people. Recidivism is a challenge for correction systems across the country, but with NYC's high cost of living and competitive job market, it is especially difficult for those who have been justice-involved to stay out of jail. However, Mayor Adams has eliminated funding for programs that would help those who are incarcerated get jobs, find housing, receive mental health and substance use treatment, and reconnect with their families after their release to save \$17 million—and now all city agencies must cut their budgets by an additional 15 percent by spring. I have been hearing concerns from providers about their ability to implement programming which we hope to follow up with the administration about later.

Perhaps the most effective way we can reduce the population at Rikers Island is to ensure that once people leave, they do not come back. We know that education and employment programming also reduces violence inside jails. Leaving people idle while inside jail and without

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<https://www.cityandstateny.com/policy/2022/09/how-many-people-are-detained-rikers-look-crisis-numbers/377840/>

² <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>

³ <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/housing.html>

support outside is a recipe for disaster—not only for the incarcerated population but officers and other staff as well. DOC’s budget is driven not by programming, rehabilitation, and services for incarcerated people, but by a correction staff that far outnumbers the jail population. Natural attrition is neither fast nor targeted enough to create a workforce equipped to staff the borough-based jails. Eliminating vacant positions and chronically absent staff will save hundreds of millions of dollars that can be reinvested in what actually keeps jails safe: healthcare, programming, treatment, education, restorative justice, and alternatives to incarceration.

Further, people released from DOC custody cannot re-enroll for benefits like Social Security and Medicaid without proof that they are no longer incarcerated—discharge papers, or, as DOC calls it, a “letter of incarceration.” DOC does not automatically provide these papers to people being released, instead requiring them to request it from a specific DOC office. Previously, DOC would refer individuals being released to third-party organizations to assist, but, under the recent cuts to outside contracts, those organizations have reduced capacity. To solve this hurdle, Councilmember Riley has introduced Int 1203, which would require DOC to provide a letter of incarceration to all people leaving DOC custody. I want to thank Councilmember Riley for this important bill, and I have signed on.

Lastly, I want to emphasize that successful reentry begins while people are incarcerated. Those reentering the community need housing and employment support, as well as physical and mental healthcare. We should also be investing in community-based restorative justice models that avoid the destabilizing and disruptive effects of incarceration, both for those serving time and their loved ones.

Thank you.



Testimony of

Kingsley Rowe

Senior Forensic Social Worker, Reentry Unit

New York County Defender Services

Before the

Committee on Criminal Justice

Oversight Hearing – DOC and DOP Probation Programming and Reentry Services

November 29, 2023

My name is Kingsley Rowe. I am the Senior Forensic Social Worker in the Reentry Unit at New York County Defender Services. NYCDS is a public defender office that represents people in thousands of cases in Manhattan criminal courts every year. I have been helping people to re-enter their communities after incarceration since 2006. In my current role at NYCDS, I provide social work services and support to our clients leaving Rikers Island and other city jails.

I am grateful for the chance to testify today about the lack of DOC programming in our city jails and steps the City Council can take to support our community members as they return home. The largest challenge facing our clients who are exiting city jails is housing. The City Council must do everything in its power to reinstate the funding that was taken away from Fortune Society and other providers in our jails. But if we are to address the root causes of re-arrest, then we must also tackle the lack of safe housing for people coming out of our jails and prisons.

New York County Defender Services

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I. Reinstate Funding for Rikers Outside Service Providers

Like many organizations who support people with criminal legal system involvement, New York County Defender Services was outraged to learn this spring that DOC decided to cut \$17 million for classes and re-entry services on Rikers and on The Boat. The \$17 million made up just 1.4% of the NYC Department of Correction's \$1.2 billion budget.¹

These services were a lifeline to our clients and it is deeply disturbing that they were cut. For years, NYCDS clients have depended on the job training, conflict resolution, discharge planning and therapeutic services that organizations like the Fortune Society, Osborne Association, FedCap Inc., Greenhope, SCO Family of Services and the Horticultural Society of NY provided. Perhaps more importantly, these organizations operated both within and outside of the jail walls, so people who connected with them inside were already connected to services and support when they were released. The organizations also hired people with criminal legal system involvement to provide these services in Rikers. This meant that staff members were credible messengers to my clients, inspiring them to choose another path and end the cycle of re-arrest and incarceration that entraps so many. Many of these individuals were laid-off as a result of these cuts.

We see two main reasons why the funding should be restored. First, DOC is patently unfit to provide re-entry services and support to people in their custody. Decades of litigation, hundreds of jail-attributable deaths, countless reports by the Board of Correction and other oversight bodies, and the brazen recalcitrance of DOC leadership plainly illustrate this fact.² Second, they are not out in the community, and cannot provide that crucial bridge to people behind and outside of the jail walls that providers like Fortune and the others do. Now that bridge has been torn down; it must be reconstructed.

Since the loss of this funding in June, I have witnessed a change at Rikers. Far too many of my clients are falling through the cracks. Brad H clients, who everyone knows are designated Brad H, are not receiving the services or discharge planning to which they are entitled. When I reach out to Rikers caseworkers to check on what is being done for my clients, too often they don't even

¹ Matt Katz, "Mayor Adams cuts classes and re-entry services at Rikers to save \$17 million in NYC budget," *Gothamist*, May 16, 2023, available at <https://gothamist.com/news/mayor-adams-cuts-classes-and-re-entry-services-at-rikers-to-save-17-million-in-nyc-budget>.

² See, e.g., Chelsea Rose Marcius, "New York Awards Up to \$53 Million to Detainees Wrongly Held in Solitary," *NY Times*, April 19, 2023, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/19/nyregion/rikers-settlement-solitary-confinement.html>; Graham Rayman, "NYC jail deaths at highest rate since 2000; hundreds have died at Rikers and other lockups over two decades," *Daily News*, March 1, 2023, available at <https://www.nydailynews.com/2023/03/01/nyc-jail-deaths-at-highest-rate-since-2000-hundreds-have-died-at-rikers-and-other-lockups-over-two-decades/>; Gabrielle Fonrouge, "Squalid, crowded conditions return to Rikers Island intake center," *NY Post*, June 14, 2022, available at: <https://nypost.com/2022/06/14/squalid-crowded-conditions-return-to-rikers-island-intake-center/>; Jan Ransom, "Once Praised, Jails Chief Draws Ire Over Lack of Transparency on Rikers," *NY Times*, July 25, 2023, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/25/nyregion/rikers-island-jail-chief-molina.html>.

know who I am talking about. I represented another client who had a good chance of returning to the community from Rikers, but we were struggling to get this person into a program. My client struggled with serious mental illness and substance use issues. Because of the Brad H settlement, this person should have been on the Department's radar and should have been receiving interventions and support from DOC caseworkers and medical staff. They were not, and instead it fell on NYCDS staff to fill the gap that DOC is required to fulfill.

Simply put, DOC is not able to meet their basic legal obligations to the people in their custody, let alone provide robust, meaningful re-entry programming.

Recommendation: The City Council must intervene and ensure funding for these critical re-entry services for people incarcerated in city jails. And to the extent that we cannot make that happen quickly, the city must invest in other services and support for our clients, including, most importantly, housing.

II. Why Housing Matters

In addition to more than 15 years of professional social work reentry experience, I am also a person directly impacted by the criminal legal system. I strongly believe that access to safe housing was crucial to my subsequent success and ability to gain my social work degree, pursue my chosen career, and start a family.

Unlike many of our clients, when I was released from my prison, I had a safe place to go. My father owns his own home and he invited me to come live with him while I got back on my feet. I had my own room and the support of my family as I entered the job market and went back to school. Fortunately, unlike most New Yorkers returning from jail or prison, I obtained my associate's degree while incarcerated. This meant that when I returned home, I already had a leg up in my job search. I also applied and was accepted to New York University where I received my undergraduate and social work degrees. During my first year at home, I lived with my family rent-free. This gave me the peace and safety to reacclimate, find my footing, and ultimately pursue my goals. But for most of our clients at NYCDS, this option is not available to them.

A. Lack of Affordable Housing

The number one barrier to successful reentry in New York City is affordable housing. This is the biggest problem that I see with our reentry clients, and the problem that is most difficult for me to support them with. Almost all New Yorkers, aside from the wealthy, struggle to access affordable housing. Access is even more difficult for people returning from jail or prison who have no savings and a criminal record. Investing in housing for people returning from jail and prison is not just the right thing to do, it will also make all of our communities safer. When people have safe and secure housing, employment and education, they are better equipped to avoid future criminal legal system

involvement and pursue their own ambitions. Forcing homelessness, poverty, and exclusion from mainstream society on our returning citizens only makes it less likely that they will succeed. City Council must address reentry and housing issues by putting in place policies that make housing more affordable and accessible for all New Yorkers, including rental subsidies, building new housing, and supporting and improving NYCHA housing.³

B. Supportive Housing and ACT Teams

Supportive housing is permanent, affordable housing in which support services are offered on-site to help homeless, disabled and low-income people, as well as those with other special needs (such as HASA housing), that allow them to live independently in the community.⁴ A 2015 study by Dr. Ross MacDonald and other doctors from NYC Correctional Health Services followed the people most frequently admitted to city jails and found that tailored supportive housing was the most effective way to stop the revolving door of incarceration for high-needs individuals.⁵ Yet supportive housing remains severely underfunded. It's estimated there are four potential new residents for every opening in supportive housing in our city.⁶ Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Teams also play a crucial role in supporting high-needs New Yorkers, but are not available to all of our clients who need them.⁷ New York City must increase the number of supportive housing beds and ACT Teams available to support the most vulnerable New Yorkers. Even in a fiscal crisis, we must continue to fund existing beds and bring more beds online.

III. Reentry-specific Housing: Emergency Safe Landing Units

NYCDS clients who do not qualify for supportive housing or other specialty housing are in some ways even worse off than clients who do. For the average person leaving Rikers Island who does not have an SMI or substance use disorder, there is no low barrier access to safe emergency and transitional housing outside of the city's notoriously troubled shelter system. Returning New Yorkers without these specific needs also require swift access to emergency and transitional

³ See, e.g., Alex Schwartz, "The Daunting Math of Solving New York's Housing Crisis," The New School Center for New York City Affairs, Jan. 29, 2020, available at <http://www.centrernyc.org/the-daunting-math-of-solving-new-york-housing-crisis>; NYU Furman Center, *Housing for an Inclusive New York: Affordable Housing Strategies for High-Cost New York*, available at <https://furmancenter.org/nychousing/housinginclusiveny>.

⁴ Supportive Housing Network of New York, "Supportive Housing FAQs," available at <https://shnny.org/supportive-housing/faq/>.

⁵ Ross MacDonald et al, "The Rikers Island Hot Spotters: Defining the Needs of the Most Frequently Incarcerated," *105 Am J Public Health* 2262-8 (2015), available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26378829/>.

⁶ Jarrett Murphy, "Housing for NYC's Most Vulnerable Under Scrutiny for 'Screening,'" *City Limits*, July 5, 2018, available at <https://citylimits.org/2018/07/05/debate-about-whether-nyc-housing-for-the-most-vulnerable-rebuffs-some-who-need-help/>.

⁷ Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams include mental health and substance use professionals and, at times, peer specialists. ACT teams typically meet with clients six times per month in their home or community to provide long-term behavioral health treatment, including medication. See Mayor's Office of ThriveNYC, Assertive Community Treatment Teams, available at <https://thrivenyc.cityofnewyork.us/program/assertive-community-treatment-teams-act>.

housing and other additional supports – the kind of supports that I benefited from during my return. Fortune Society’s Academy (aka The Castle) is the model for supporting people returning from jail and prison.⁸ But there is simply not enough reentry housing in New York City, particularly for people without SMI or substance use issues. The City Council must invest in more.

During the pandemic, New York City created a new type of emergency re-entry housing that was an enormous success that must be continued. What was referred to at the time as the Emergency Reentry Hotels program (and what we now call Emergency Safe Landing Units) was started in New York City in the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic under contract with the Mayor’s Office for Criminal Justice. Through this program, people released from incarceration at Rikers and upstate prisons were placed in one of the designated six hotels in the city. The program was operated by Exodus Transitional Community until December of 2022, and is now operated by Housing Works. Through this program, individuals were housed in private hotel rooms that provided them with essential privacy, safety, and stability. Exodus and Housing Works staffed the hotels 24/7 to provide people with targeted case management, a dedicated security team, on-site medical and mental health services, as well as other support to help people transition and integrate back into the community. The program also offers job training/placement, benefits enrollment, obtaining of IDs, daily meals, clothing, and other essentials to the residents.

The Emergency Safe Landing Units model was successful. We will attach with this written testimony some materials further detailing the success of this model, but for the purposes of this written testimony, here are some simple statistics about the program:

- **2,490** people were served by the hotel program between 2020-2022.
- **400** people were connected to permanent housing.
- **717** were connected to substance use or mental health treatment.
- **347** reunited with family.
- **499** people continue to be supported in the hotels, working actively towards permanent housing.

For many people in custody during the period 2020-2022 when this program could accept new residents, the availability of a hotel bed, coupled with the specialized reentry services offered on site, was **the sole reason that a judge or prosecutor agreed to release an individual** from DOC custody. Similarly, the availability of a room in the SARA-compliant⁹ Holiday Inn location resulted in many releases of people being held past their release date in upstate prison.

⁸ Learn more about all of Fortune Society’s reentry services, including The Castle, at www.fortunesociety.org.

⁹ According to the Sexual Assault Reform Act (SARA), people convicted of certain sex offenses must not reside within 1000 feet of a school.

I want to share a story about a NYCDS client who benefited from an Emergency Safe Landing Unit last year after advocacy by our forensic social work team:

Our client, Mr. Jones¹⁰ was released to parole in early 2022 and was able to return to the community. However, he has no place to live and no supports he knew of in the city. Thanks to the option of MOCJ emergency re-entry hotels with its low barrier to access (with the need for housing being the criteria for housing), Mr. Jones was able to get a hotel room in one of the MOCJ emergency hotels. There, Mr. Jones was able to begin to stabilize after decades of incarceration and instability. He was able to get a private room with some peace and quiet so he could sleep at night amidst his dementia and health issues. He was able to use a private bathroom without fear of being assaulted. He was able to get a hot meal three times a day. He was able to have clean laundry. He was able to get a medical treatment plan. He was able to get his first cell phone. He was able to learn how to use his cell phone.

Without the emergency re-entry hotel option, an elder like Mr. Jones would have yet again been cast away by our society and he would have been without a home upon his return to the community, this time from Rikers. Moreover, without his emergency re-entry hotel room, Mr. Jones could have been immediately violated on his parole as he would not have had a reportable address.

According to MOCJ, at the end of August, about 600 units that were in operation out of the approved 950-1000 transitional housing beds were already full. Therefore, people leaving Rikers do not have any emergency and transitional housing options at this time.

Recommendation: The City Council must ensure continued funding of Emergency Safe Landing Units for people returning home from jail or prison so that we can effectively interrupt the cycle of recidivism and make our communities safer and healthier.

IV. Phones Upon Release from City Jails

A related but equally critical problem for NYCDS clients leaving Rikers is access to a cell phone. These days, a cell phone is necessary for anyone looking to find a job, housing, or access education. Our clients need phones with video capability to attend court appearances or classes, do telehealth visits, attend AA meetings, and submit paperwork.

During the early days of the pandemic, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice provided free phones to people being released from city jails. These phones were a lifeline for our clients while the city was on lockdown, allowing them to access services and stay in contact with their defense

¹⁰ Name changed and personal details omitted to protect the client's privacy.

teams. Yet when the new fiscal year began in July 2020, the MOCJ funding for phones dried up. Clients who are being released now are not receiving free phones. This makes it difficult or impossible for me to contact clients who don't have a family member or friend from whom they can borrow a phone.

A. DOC Phone Program

In July of 2023, the Department of Correction rolled out a new phone program,¹¹ seemingly as a PR stunt to detract attention away from their dismal human rights record and gross violations of safety and inability to perform their basic function of bringing people who are incarcerated to court appearances or medical visits. At the time, DOC reported that CHS would distribute phones to “the neediest former patients.”¹²

In our experience, almost no one receives these phones. I was on Rikers Island this week, on Sept. 27, 2023, and spoke to the officer in the “re-entry service center.” I learned that phones are only distributed to people with serious mental illness, people older than 60, or transgender people. I was told that “regular people,” i.e. the vast majority of our clients who do not fall into these categories, do not qualify. This is unacceptable. Cell phones are a crucial lifeline for our clients – yet this program is so limited as to be ineffective, as is typically the case with DOC-run programs.

During the pandemic, New York City, via MOCJ-funded service providers, was able to provide our clients leaving Rikers with phones previously, which demonstrates that it could do so again now. This critical program should be reinstated to ensure that people never have to enter the revolving door of arrest and incarceration again. A cell phone is crucial to that success.

Ideally the phones should be smart phones preloaded with Zoom and Microsoft Teams (the app used by the courts) to allow people to use the phones in lieu of in-person court appearances or in-person mental health or other social service appointments. It costs the City \$460 to incarcerate a person for a single day on Rikers. An entire year of city jail incarceration costs more than \$337,000 per person. For less than \$100, we can put a phone in the hands of every person leaving jail to facilitate their reentry and hopefully prevent future incarceration. The free phones program piloted by MOCJ from March-June of 2020 was a success.

Recommendation: The City Council should ensure that every person leaving DOC custody has access to a phone, whether from the jail itself or from service providers contracting with MOCJ to provide re-entry services to people leaving jail and prison.

¹¹ See, e.g., Reuven Blau, “Dialed In: City Hall Set to Supply Free Phones to People Newly Released from Rikers,” The City, July 12, 2023, available at <https://www.thecity.nyc/2023/7/12/23793153/free-phones-people-released-from-rikers#:~:text=Phones%20for%20people%20newly%20released,entrance%20to%20the%20jails%20complex>.

¹² *Id.*

V. Recommendations

NYCDS offers the following recommendations to facilitate successful reentry for people leaving city jails:

1. Reinstate the \$17 million for services and increase funding in the next fiscal year for those services in DOC facilities provided by outside providers like the Fortune Society.
2. Fund 1,000 new emergency and transitional housing units.
3. Fully fund supportive housing, ACT Teams and reentry housing programs like The Castle to ensure that people returning from jails and prisons have a safe place to live.
4. Pass the following legislation:
 - a. *T2023-4050* - A local law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York in relation to requiring the Department of Correction to provide a letter of incarceration to all individuals as they leave the department's custody
 - b. *Intro 549-2022* - A bill to end solitary confinement in NYC jails. This legislation will ensure all people have access to programs and end the abusive practices of isolation and deprivation that are prevalent in the jails and replace them with restorative justice, programming, and support to address underlying causes of harmful behavior and make everyone safer.
 - c. New legislation from Chair Rivera introduced this week that will codify notification procedures and timelines related to the death of an individual in DOC custody and implement mechanisms to improve accountability and transparency in a perpetual broken criminal legal system. DOC has shown that they are willing to obfuscate the truth about conditions in their facilities -- including deaths of people in their custody-- wherever possible. The Council must require transparency.
5. Ensure that *every* person leaving city jails is provided a free smartphone to facilitate their reentry.

If you have any questions about my testimony, please email me at krowe@nycds.org.

**The Bronx
Defenders**

**Redefining
public
defense**

**New York City Council
Committee on Criminal Justice**

**Public Hearing regarding Department of Corrections Programming
September 29, 2023**

Written Testimony of The Bronx Defenders

By Zakya Warkeno, Policy Advocate & Social Worker, Criminal Defense Practice

Dear Chairperson Carlina Rivera,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in-person at the Committee on Criminal Justice's Oversight hearing on the Department of Corrections' (DOC) changes to programming. Advocates in our office were outraged when we heard that the Adams Administration and DOC were getting rid of the 17-million-dollar budget for community-based programs, making themselves, the Department, program providers. This is problematic in a myriad of ways.

Prior to my current role at Bronx Defenders, I was a GreenHouse instructor in the horticulture program at Rikers. As a former educator on the Island, I saw the value in participants learning new skills and making accomplishments. People get excited for hands on experience that they can take to an employer, and people get excited about seeing the arc of progress from being a novice to being intermediate to being able to share knowledge with others. There is value in a participant getting a certificate for the first time in their life, increasing their self-esteem. Programming allows participants to tap into creativity and see beyond a world they know and helps to get people to be visionaries for their future beyond jail. There is a lot of intentionality and thoughtfulness that goes into creating lesson plans that will enrich people with experiential learning. This will be lost on DOC. DOC is not equipped to train people in trades. They have repeatedly demonstrated their inability to maintain even the minimum standards of care for those subjected to their custody.

Back in June, I was speaking with a client who was in RESH, which is the new enhanced supervision housing unit located behind the Rose M Singer Center, and I asked that client to describe what programming looks like. From what my client described, this programming did not seem to be run by an outside, community provider because I asked my client to get the facilitator's email address so that I could be in regular contact with that person and possibly get a court letter of support, and my client informed me that the facilitator was a DOC employee. My client explained that they were chained to a desk and given a packet to work through by themselves. My client did not report any further engagement around the packet that they were

given. This is a preview of what's to come if DOC is allowed to be providers of programming. We urge City Council members to visit Rikers and see for themselves.

Programming run by community providers is not only important for a person's enrichment but also for the advocacy of the person in custody. A participant's involvement in programming becomes an advocacy tool for negotiating with judges and assistant district attorneys for better case outcomes. DOC becoming the gatekeepers of court letters of support and verification of participation is unfair and unjust and would impede court case progression.

As advocates, we highlight the stories and strengths of the people we represent in pre pleading investigation reports or PPIs to district attorneys and judges. For our incarcerated clients, mitigation reports typically highlight their participation in programs because they are a vehicle for changing the course of their life. This was a vital part of the PPI, and the sort of programming that is often referenced in our advocacy.

If DOC is the gatekeeper for such programming, it will create a real conflict of interest. The Department has no investment in helping incarcerated folks get out of jail and move on beyond incarceration. Moreover, with the staffing issues still unresolved, despite their press release from January 31, 2022 that 1000 uniformed staff returned to work, we would be concerned that DOC would fail to even escort participants to their programming in the first place, not to mention the potential deficiencies to program letters and updates to the court which must be strengths-based and truly advocate for a detained person's future. This is a conflict that we urge City Council to address.

We also urge City Council to pass two important bills: one of them being Intro 549, sponsored by the Public Advocate, which will end solitary confinement in NYC jails and have a more humane form of separation, and the other being Intro 1203-2023, Councilmember Riley's bill, which would require DOC to provide a letter of incarceration, also known as jail release papers or discharge papers, to every person that gets released from the department's custody, specifying the date that a person entered and was released from custody.



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TESTIMONY OF:

Rebecca Kinsella
Associate Director of Social Work

BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES

Presented before

The New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice
Oversight Hearing on Department of Correction and Department of
Probation's Programming and Reentry Services

September 29, 2023

My name is Rebecca Kinsella, and I am the Associate Director of Social Work for our Criminal Defense Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS). BDS is a public defense office whose mission is to provide outstanding representation and advocacy free of cost to people facing loss of freedom, family separation and other serious legal harms by the government. For over 25 years, BDS has worked, in and out of court, to protect and uphold the rights of individuals and to change laws and systems that perpetuate injustice and inequality. Thank you to the Committee on Criminal Justice for the opportunity to testify today about the Department of Correction and Department of Probation's Programming and Reentry Services.

BDS represents approximately 22,000 people each year who are accused of a crime, facing the removal of their children, or deportation. BDS is fortunate to have the support of the City Council to supplement the services we provide as a public defender office in Brooklyn. Through specialized units of the office, we provide extensive wrap-around services that meet the needs of people with legal system involvement, including civil legal advocacy, assistance with educational needs of our clients or their children, housing, and benefits advocacy, as well as immigration advice and representation. Hundreds of the people we serve are detained or incarcerated in the City jail system either while fighting their cases in court or upon conviction of a misdemeanor and a sentence of a year or less.

Programming inside DOC Facilities

In May of this year, BDS appeared before this Committee to express our strong opposition to the mayor's proposed cuts to the budgets of community-based agencies providing services in NYC's jails. We are now seeing the impact of these budget cuts. Critical programs and classes—including therapy, educational, and job training classes—have been eliminated. DOC has been unable to adequately provide these programs. Programs provided by Fortune, Osborne, GreenHope, and other community-based organizations (CBOs) provided not only practical services, but a connection to community. After leaving Rikers, people had relationships with providers who could provide a continuum of care.

I visit people in custody every week and I know that these programs have been critical to keeping people healthy, safe, and motivated to keep fighting their cases. Many of my clients are facing serious charges, which means they have been in jail for months—if not years—waiting for their cases to move through the system. We have appeared before this Committee countless times to tell you that Rikers is dangerous, that it is unsafe, that people are dying inside. You know that the physical buildings are deteriorating, and staff are at best exhausted and at worst horrifically abusive. The people we represent are sitting in those conditions for days or weeks or months or years, without anything to do to pass the time and without any way to process their fear, concern, grief, or anger. People are isolated and, after the cuts to funding, there is increasingly *nothing* for people to do.

One person I work with is detained in the new Enhanced Supervision Housing at RMSC (RESH). He receives what DOC calls “programming” while chained to a restraint desk. In his unit, DOC has been bringing half of the population out of their cells for programming at 5 a.m., where they remain locked to a desk until around 9 a.m. During most of these hours, no programs are taking place. People are sitting chained to a desk while waiting hours for a DOC program provider to arrive. As a result, many choose not to participate at all.

Two young men BDS represents shared that the programs they had been actively participating in disappeared over the summer, at the same time CBOs faced funding cuts. These were programs such as OSHA, CPR, Driving, welding, and digital literacy. Collectively, the two had completed more than 7 certifications. They are both eager to participate in any other programming and to achieve certifications that will help them readjust their lives after incarceration, but none are currently available.

Another young person has been completing GED coursework – and is very close to completing the program, but school in his unit has been discontinued. He told us that there are at least 10 other school-age people in his unit who would like to participate, but DOC has not allowed them to do so.



A person detained in RMSC reported increased psychiatric distress since GreenHope's programming was terminated in the jails. Without a way to process her situation, she reports increased hopelessness and suicidality.

These stories are not isolated incidents. We hear every day from people in custody who are seeking opportunities to use their time in jail to learn skills and access supports that will benefit them beyond their time in jail. Program participation is especially critical for parents who are seeking to reunite with their children after incarceration, people trying to access treatment courts, and those who are mandated to receive anger management or substance abuse counseling.

After today's hearing, we have several questions for the Department that remain unanswered, including:

- What specific programs are provided in each facility and by housing unit? What is the frequency of program offering (e.g., how many times per week), duration of each session, subject matter covered, and certifications offered?
- What percentage of people in custody have access to the minimum standard 5 hours of programs per day?
- What credentials do DOC civilian staff have to provide group counseling? Are they licensed mental health providers?
- What programs does DOC plan to provide that are not yet offered?

Conclusion

The decision by the mayor to cut DOC programs was dangerously misguided and shortsighted. Contrary to their claims before the Committee, DOC has been unable to adequately replace the quantity and quality of the programs facilitated by CBOs. The Council must work to fully restore the funding for community-based reentry and jail-based programming to ensure that incarcerated New Yorkers have access to the support they need to survive their time in jail and successfully return to the community.

We thank the City Council for your continued advocacy on this issue. If you have any questions, please reach out to me at RKinsella@bds.org.



NYC Council Committee on Criminal Justice
Oversight - Department of Correction and Department of Probation's
Programming and Reentry Services
Support for Works Plus Program

To: Councilmember Carlina Rivera, Chair - Committee on Criminal Justice
From: Hubert Lila, Director, Works Plus, Brooklyn Community Services
Date: September 29, 2023

Chair Rivera,

Good Morning, my name is Hubert Lila. I am a program director at Brooklyn Community Services (BCS) and I supervise the East New York DOP Works Plus program. We service 34 at-risk individuals a year from the ENY section of Brooklyn, one of the highest poverty and housing-insecure sections of NYC.

Work Plus assists young people between the ages of 16 and 30 with professional development, vocational training, employment assistance, as well as conflict resolution, but more importantly, we instill hope and motivation into our young adults.

Yes, we can quantify how many of our clients earn credential training, earn GEDs, or secure employment. I know metrics are important to this body; but how do we quantify self-esteem, self-dignity, and self-pride? We can't physically measure these variables but still, we have many client testimonies that demonstrate transformation, emotional growth, and maturity since participating in Works Plus.

They all can't be here today, so I would like to amplify their voices:

- Tahir D. "Work Plus didn't only help me acquire my OSHA certification and internship, it helped me realize there's more to life than just my block. That the way things are is not the way things have to be; and if I can change my way of thinking and my perception then I can change my reality."

- Eddie B. “Works Plus taught me that not every problem has to be fixed with a hammer, and that the more tools I have in my toolbox, meaning life skills, then the better I would be at resolving issues and managing crises in my life. Today I am confident that I can de-escalate negative situations in my life and I don’t have to resort to violence to solve any problem.”
- William S: “I wanted to do better and knew I had to choose a better way to feed my family, but I didn’t know where to start and traditional school wasn’t for me. But Works Plus, allowed me to earn a certified Vocational Training, helped me with my resume, and to secure a job working in construction. I no longer have to hustle to support my family, and most importantly, I’m becoming the man my kids can be proud of to call Dad.”

These are just a few testimonies from the clients we serve. Our unique combination of college-educated and credible messenger staff allows us to meet clients where they are, walk with them, and guide them to where they need to be. There is no one size fits all, and each client is different and unique, so our approach is different as well. We don’t tell clients what they have to do, we ask them what they want to do, and where they want to be a year from now, and we help them get there.

If we lose Work Plus then we lose hope for a better ENY. The only difference between young people in ENY and those in Brooklyn Heights is not their ability but their access to opportunities; and Work Plus brings that accessibility to ENY.

Thank you, Chair Rivera and the Committee for your time, and for giving me this opportunity to provide testimony in support of Works Plus.



NYC Council Committee on Criminal Justice
Oversight - Department of Correction and Department of Probation's
Programming and Reentry Services
Support for Works Plus Program

To: Councilmember Carlina Rivera, Chair - Committee on Criminal Justice
From: Janelle Farris, Executive Director - Brooklyn Community Services
Date: September 29, 2023

Councilmember Rivera,

I am Janelle Farris, Executive Director of Brooklyn Community Services (BCS), an organization that fosters the educational success of children, the leadership development of youth, and the employment and housing stability of adults in Brooklyn. I am here to testify in support of Work Plus programs. The Department of Probation needs to uphold its own mission by funding programs that keep people out of the parole system, and that includes Work Plus.

At BCS, we operate a Works Plus program in East New York - a community that has been disproportionately impacted by systemic poverty, violence, and disinvestment. Through this program we connect youth who have been involved in street violence, incarcerated, or dropped out of school and have limited education and work skills, to counseling, workforce training, and individualized support. BCS' Works Plus, helps youth to achieve stability for themselves and their families, to make better decisions, and become contributing members of their communities.

In January 2022, The Adams Administration released [*A Blueprint for Community Safety*](#) which outlines a roadmap with strategies to reduce gun violence throughout New

York City. The blueprint targets communities where opportunities and skills training are needed for young New Yorkers who are justice-involved, or maybe on that path. The Works Plus program is a worthy component of the Mayor's plan.

At BCS Work Plus, a cohort of 34 participants are engaged for one year. We provide them with case management, education and workforce training, as well as referrals to mental health support and other services. Since 2020, nearly 100 young people have received this support and earned certification and/or credentials for upwardly mobile employment. We are proud of young people like Tahir Dukes. Tahir was referred to Works Plus by a friend who completed our program. Since entering Work Plus, Tahir has earned several OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) certifications and earns a living wage working in construction and building maintenance.

Eliminating Works Plus programs will take opportunities away from young people like Tahir that can put them on the path to being successful and self-actualized. The Department of Probation's mission is to "hold people on probation accountable and give them opportunities to forge new pathways so that they can move out and stay out of the justice system"¹. Ending these Work Plus contracts is counterintuitive, and in direct conflict with the *Blueprint for Community Safety*. The Department of Probation needs to "maintain interventions that start earlier, focus on positive youth development, and address how NYC youth are disconnected from fundamental career and educational pathways" as the blueprint states. Please consider investing even more in these programs, expanding these opportunities instead of eliminating them.

Thank you, Chair Rivera and the Committee for your time, and for giving me this opportunity to provide testimony in support of Works Plus.

¹ <https://www.nyc.gov/site/probation/about/about-department-of-probation.page>



New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice
Oversight - Department of Correction and Department of
Probation's Programming and Reentry Services

Good morning, I'm Nadia Chait, the Senior Director of Policy & Advocacy at CASES. Thank you to Chair Rivera for the opportunity to testify today. CASES is a nationally recognized leader in the development of innovative programs to address the intersection of unmet mental health needs and criminal legal system involvement. We served over 9,000 New Yorkers last year, of whom nearly 90% identified as Black and/or Latino, consistent with disparities in policing and sentencing. Our programs prevent the harm and trauma of incarceration through pretrial services and alternatives to incarceration (ATI); support achievement of education, employment, health and housing goals; promote mental wellbeing through a range of clinical and case management programs; and improve public safety through community-based solutions.

CASES has a long history of partnering with the Department of Probation (DOP) on programs that help young people to achieve their full potential and avoid further interaction with the criminal legal system. Unfortunately, recent actions by the Department have failed to fulfill their obligations as a partner and have left our young people without the services they need. We have had two contracts abruptly cancelled, and we do not have clarity on several of our remaining contracts. These are essential programs for our young people, serving those under the supervision of Probation and providing preventive services to a wider community. Over the last two decades, DOP has been a national leader in building out Probation services that truly meet the needs of people being supervised, and that work to keep more individuals from falling under supervision. This shift improved public safety, stabilized communities and led to increases in employment. DOP should not turn away from this track record of success.

Cancellation of Next STEPS Program

On August 24th, we were shocked to receive notice that our contract with DOP for the NextSTEPS program would be terminated effective Thursday, August 31st. This cancellation covered the entire program, which operated at 15 different New York City Housing Authority developments. CASES operated this program at the Tompkins and Bushwick Houses in Brooklyn. Citywide, the program served over 240 young people and employed at least 40 individuals, who lost their jobs with less than one week of notice.

Next STEPS, an initiative of the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety, offered one-on-one and group mentoring within a cognitive behavioral therapy-based curriculum designed to help young adults make the attitudinal and behavioral changes necessary to avoid criminal activity and re-engage with education, work and community. The program was started in 2014 and provides services in each borough. Mentorship is a critical support for many of our young people, as noted in [Mayor Adams' Blueprint for Community Safety](#). Mentors helped youth connect to educational and vocational opportunities, provided youth with a trusted adult who can support them in challenging times, and helped guide youth as they navigate decisions and enter adulthood. Next STEPS programs employed community members, providing them with an opportunity to achieve both economic stability and mobility.

The abrupt closure of the program was unexpected and astonishing. We were given less than 5 business days to close a program, after receiving no communication from DOP regarding the program for several months while we awaited contract renewal. This is an unacceptable way to treat nonprofit partners, and a horrible way to end a program that is grounded in the development of trusting relationships between young people and their mentors.

For CASES, the program cancellation impacted over 30 active program participants and alumni, 2 full-time staff and 6 part-time staff members. One of our staff members continues to have program participants reach out to her, asking when we will be meeting again and what the next activities are.

Our program participants wrote a letter sharing their frustration at the cancellation of this program, and what the benefits of the program were to them:

“Next STEPS has helped us to find jobs and internships while helping to motivate us on a daily basis. Next STEPS creates a good, safe, positive space for us to express ourselves and be free. With mentors that genuinely care, it gives us extra support from someone that we can go to without the fear of being turned away. This program has encouraged us to always do the right thing and to follow in the right path.

“Through this program we receive help with things like resume writing, filling out job applications and preparing for interviews. Our mentors work with us to better prepare us for these jobs by leading mock interviews, shopping for professional clothing, and whatever can be done to help us develop as professionals...Everyday has become a learning experience for us and through sex education, know your rights, boxing, chat no cap, and juvenile justice awareness to name a few, we have gained new knowledge...

“Whenever we are in need Next STEPS works to help us in ways that we are forever thankful for. We are grateful to have such an amazing program with loving staff that have assisted us in getting out of our comfort zones in order to reach new peaks.”

The City should reverse this decision and restore funding for the program immediately. The cost of the entire program is just \$2.5 million, a small cost for the unmeasurable impact of transforming lives and guiding young people to achieve their full potential.

Cancellation of IMPACT Contract

In 2022, CASES was awarded an RFP for the IMPACT program, to provide an alternative to placement (ATP) program for young people in family court and/or Criminal Supreme Court. Unfortunately, we recently received notice that this contract will be terminated without DOP ever allowing us to start work on this contract.

IMPACT would have provided a critical service to young people and their families, by providing home-based family therapy, credible messenger mentorship, and helping clients reach their educational, employment and pro-social goals. The contract was intended to start on January 1, 2023. CASES hired staff and conducted outreach to community organizations, public defenders, district attorney’s offices and judges to provide information about the program and our intake

process. We have been prepared to launch this program for several months, however, DOP refused to provide their sign-off to let us start, while also failing to communicate what else was needed to get the program off the ground. In May, DOP briefly gave us permission to start the program, and we conducted an intake. However, before we were able to enroll this participant, DOP informed us that we needed to stop all work on this program, and that we would not be able to start the program until a program manager at DOP was hired. This was in July of 2023, seven months after we were prepared to start the program.

Despite repeated outreach to DOP after this, we were never allowed to start the program. On Monday, September 25th, we received notice that the contract was terminated with an effective date of October 9th.

There is no equivalent ATP for our young people – although DOP and ACS both operate other ATPs, these serve young people with different needs than IMPACT. This program would have served 175 young people across the city, who are otherwise highly likely to experience juvenile detention. These young people deserve access to the robust supports IMPACT would have provided, instead of being forced out of their community into a less supportive and more expensive setting. We have not received any information from DOP regarding how they plan to serve these young people without IMPACT.

Probation's Overall Programming

In addition to the programs referenced above, CASES partners with DOP on:

- Works Plus, which offers 12 weeks of job readiness training to youth and young adults aged 17-30. Our Works Plus program operates in Central Harlem. In addition to supporting employment, the program supports educational goals by directly connecting participants to High School Equivalency classes on-site at CASES Harlem location.
 - Of the 19 youth served in the post recent fiscal year, 10 obtained employment credentials such as OSHA or food handling certification, 2 secured new jobs, 6 participated in a paid internship program run by CASES to prepare them for full-time employment, 4 participated in the Summer Youth Employment Program and 2 enrolled in educational programming.
 - Across the Works Plus program, which is operated by several nonprofits at locations throughout NYC, 320 youth are served annually. 90 youth are placed into employment and/or internships, and youth complete over 400 trainings, which include OSHA and food safety certifications that are required to obtain employment in certain fields. Additionally, over 51 young people enrolled in educational programs.
 - Participant statements:
 - IM shared the following about the impact of the program on their life: “Works Plus has helped me a lot, being street homeless at the present moment, it has helped me stay out of the street. Works plus has helped me apply and complete the summer youth program, which helped me keep some money in my pocket. I am actually trying to get one of my boys in works plus, I told him all of things the program helped me with. I am looking forward to maybe doing a winter internship. Not sure where I would be without this program honestly.”
 - OJ shared the following about the impact of the program on their life: “I really appreciate all the help the Works Plus program has given me. I did the WPP

internship in the winter and the SYEP program this past summer. The career mentor helped me fill out the application, get my documents together and work the hats and ladders thing. It is the small things I am thankful for. I still keep in contact with the career mentor even though I have finished my aftercare phase of the program, he helps with job searches and other programs. I think it is very much needed in this community.”

- PEAK (Pathways to Education, Achievement and Knowledge) is a six-month, stipend-based career exploration and job readiness program for youth ages 16-19 under the supervision of Juvenile Probation. Employment is critical to helping youth access their potential, support their families and be able to provide for their futures. We operate this program in the Bronx and Brooklyn.
- Adolescent Portable Therapy (APT), which provides short term home-based family therapy to young people under the supervision of Probation. APT is a voluntary program that Probation Officers refer young people to. We serve 30 clients a year through funding from DOP. APT aims to reduce tension in the home, support caregivers with parenting techniques and help young people work through challenges they are facing in the home and outside. As our nation faces a youth mental health crisis, this program is critical to supporting young people and helping them achieve mental wellbeing. This program also receives funding from the City Council’s Court-Involved Youth Mental Health Initiative, which allows us to serve more young people, including those who are not under Probation supervision.

These programs, combined with many other community partnerships including AIM and ARCHES, are essential to supporting young people who are actively under Probation supervision or who need additional community services. We hope that DOP remains committed to these critical programs. We understand that the Mayor has requested cuts from all agencies, but the budget cannot be balanced by taking programs away from Black and Brown young people. The cuts that have already occurred are incredible harmful to communities. Any additional cuts would further harm public safety by removing supports and resources for our young people.

These cuts will not save the City money – when young people are not supported to obtain employment and education, when they do not have access to mentors, the risk of criminal-legal system involvement and of violence is much higher. The Mayor often talks about how we need to move upstream to invest in our young people and communities and truly reduce violence. These are the upstream programs doing this work. We urge the Council to use every avenue available to ensure these programs continue to be funded, and to fight against the cuts to NextSTEPS and IMPACT.

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Center for Justice Innovation
New York City Council
Committee on Criminal Justice

Oversight – Department of Correction and Department of Probation’s Programming and Reentry Services

September 29, 2023

Good morning, Chair Rivera, and members of the City Council. Since its inception nearly 30 years ago, the Center for Justice Innovation (“the Center”) has supported the vision embraced by Council of a fair, effective, and humane justice system. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of our organization regarding the oversight of the Department of Probation and the Department of Corrections. Today, we come before you to express support for evidence-based programs that contribute to a safer New York and the continued need to invest in community-based programming.

The Center has operated the Next Steps program in Staten Island and Red Hook since 2020, in partnership with the Department of Probation. This program is a powerful example of the Administration’s desire to invest in upstream solutions to address public safety, and the research and data behind the program demonstrate its effectiveness. “Off ramps” like Next Steps are critical tools to divert people away from incarceration, prioritize rehabilitation, and address the root causes of involvement in the criminal justice system.

The Next Steps program is a mentoring intervention based on the Arches model that was found to be effective in reducing the likelihood of future convictions.¹ Next Steps was designed for young adults at-risk of criminal justice involvement between the ages of 16 and 24 residing in or near targeted New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments throughout the city. This unique program offers group and one-on-one mentoring to help participants transform attitudes and behaviors related to violence. It serves young people whose needs go beyond the traditional mentoring approach and aims to address the root causes of their involvement in criminal activities.

The Arches transformative mentoring model, which forms the basis of the NEXT Steps program, is a curriculum-based group mentoring intervention designed to help at-risk young adults transform attitudes and behaviors that have led to violence and criminal activity. Unlike traditional mentoring

**Activating ideas.
Strengthening communities.**

approaches, this program goes beyond companionship and confidence-building, delving into cognitive-behavioral principles to make lasting change. Key components of the Arches transformative mentoring intervention include group processes, culturally appropriate mentors, intensive mentor support, positive youth development principles, case management, and participant stipends. The focus is on achieving pro-social developmental outcomes that prepare participants for education, employment, and civic participation.

Next STEPS is an exceptional program that empowers and diverts youth from the justice system through a unique approach. Our monthly life skills topics serve as the foundation of our programming, equipping participants with essential skills such as communication, advocacy, problem-solving, and teamwork. We believe in practical implementation, and to achieve this, we organize educational trips to entrepreneurship conferences, art shows, and youth empowerment events across the city. Our community service projects throughout Red Hook instill a sense of responsibility and engagement in our youth. Through the power of peer support, our participants achieve remarkable success while staying clear of the justice system.

The success and impact of the Next STEPS program has been nothing short of exceptional. This past year, we served 32 outstanding youth in Red Hook. Out of the 32 participants who embraced this transformative journey, 11 graduated high school successfully and embarked on the path to higher education. Four of the 32 participants have transitioned into full-time employment, passionately pursuing real estate, music, and entrepreneurship careers.

This past Summer, Next STEPS introduced the Summer Internship Program, a platform for youth to delve into professional development and secure job placements aligned with their passions. In collaboration with other city organizations, our interns actively engaged in hands-on projects, honing their technical and personal skills. They made significant contributions, from creating social media toolkits to aiding small businesses in securing funding opportunities. They expanded their professional networks and nurtured newfound relationships. As a testament to our program's effectiveness, our attendance rates surged from 50% to a consistent 85% over eight months, illustrating the genuine enthusiasm, financial benefits, and support that Next STEPS offers to our participants.

At Next Steps youth are given the autonomy to give input into the types of activities and discussions that take place. The Staten Island youth cohort was given the opportunity to create their own service projects they felt would help their own community. The proposals were used to apply for a Hershey Grant, sponsored by Youth Service America. One of the Next Steps youths won the grant and received \$500 to execute his planned "Family Bonding Day," specifically designed to support parents and guardians in reestablishing positive connections with their children. The young person had a strong connection to the cause because his mother worked two jobs (one being a nightshift) which has made it hard for her to spend time with him. The youth used his group members, his mentors, and our site as a refuge to get support and have positive peer relationships. He was very proud to have been awarded the scholarship, plan and execute the Family Bonding Day. This participant recently graduated high school and used the scholarship experience as his college application essay. I'm proud to say that this young person is attending college this Fall.

Programs like Next STEPS and all of the Center's upstream, community-based, reform work are based in the evidence—merging the research that demonstrates what works with the humanizing passion and will that it takes to truly increase community safety.

This is not only the right approach but also the smart approach.

We focus on evidence-backed program elements such as cognitive behavioral therapy, use of credible messengers and mentors, and incorporation of the risk principle to ensure we are effectively targeting resources and program intensity at higher-risk individuals. And the need principle: addressing those “criminogenic needs” by building up prosocial peers and activities, familial support, and stable employment or educational opportunities—all needs that can only be meaningfully addressed in the community.

The research tells us that we need to invest in the whole person and build stability across multiple areas of their life. The research tells us it’s human interaction that is central to effectiveness of interventions—the quality of the human interaction outweighs the importance of any particular protocol or approach.

The research also tells us that keeping those with justice system involvement in their communities is key—a recent meta-analysis concluded that incarceration has “no effect on reoffending or slightly increases it when compared with noncustodial sanctions” and a 2022 study found that any length of time in is associated with a higher likelihood of a new arrest pending trial.

Conclusion

The Center stands ready to continue implementing proven programming which connects individuals to the services that divert them from the justice system while balancing public safety. And we look forward to continuing work with the City to forge creative solutions. We thank Council for its partnership and are happy to answer any questions you may have.

¹ Urban Institute. "Arches Transformative Mentoring Program." February 2018, Urban.org, https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/96601/arches_transformative_mentoring_program_0.pdf.



369 East 149th, 7th Floor
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Esteemed City Council Members:

My name is Belinda Ramos and I am the Interim Executive Director for Community Connections for Youth (CCFY), a long-time training and technical assistance provider to the New York City Department of Probation's (DOP) NEXT Steps, Arches and Luminaries programs. Before my current position, I was CCFY's Director of Training providing close support and training to the credible messengers, their provider organizations, DOP and related staff since 2014. From this experience, I would like to share with you our point of view on the shortsighted decision that Commissioner Holmes has made in regard to the NEXT Steps Program.

I would like to reiterate from others that NEXT Steps is a **transformative** mentoring program; this curriculum-based group mentoring intervention helps potentially justice-involved young adults to transform the attitudes and behaviors that have led to criminal activity. It serves young people whose needs go far beyond the traditional mentoring approach of companionship, confidence-building and minor academic, social or career guidance. It is about the relatability, accessibility (someone in your neighborhood who will pick up the phone at 2am) and the credibility of the source of their support. This program gets at that core of what disconnected youth often need; a relational starting place. The Commissioner in one of her recent comments to the providers on a Zoom meeting that happened recently asked a concerning question of the group, "How does going to the movies equate being a future homeowner?" The question was insulting and ill-informed as we recognize that youth—that are disconnected and untrusting of their worlds, their first need is someone they can trust. That trust is built over time with world expanding positive experiences. Over my years training the providers, I would hear comments like, "Many of our youth haven't even left their block, much less, been to Manhattan." The fact of the matter is that something like "home-ownership" takes confidence; all of life's big accomplishments require it. Credible messengers provide small and incremental experiences that serve to build up the confidence of youth furthest away from these opportunities. It concerns me that someone who does not understand this be in charge of a youth servicing agency.

The decision to cut the NEXT Steps program is detrimental to NYCHA youth and their communities. Those who delivered programming offer some of the best details of those specific impacts. However, in CCFY's case, I feel it important to submit additional testimony on the damage this has done on the reputation the DOP has held for being a



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beacon and example of credible messenger mentoring and the system-community partnerships that make this work a success.

For over 12 years, CCFY has played a critical role with the DOP in rooting and establishing its credible messenger programs from the start in 2012. We have had a close seat in witnessing the evolution of DOP's policies, programs and approaches that centered the community. We have closely witnessed the impact of a homegrown model, like the Arches program, that gave birth to more programs and initiatives in New York City, across the state and around the country.

When the Urban Institute evaluated Arches and found that the approach reduced felony convictions for young adults by 68 percent, the initial interest of those paying attention to the agency's community-vested reforms peaked. People began to take notes on what it takes to make these interventions work and one of the main factors was strong system-community partnerships. Two examples are the formation of Credible Messenger Justice Center (cmjcenter.org) and The Community Credible Messenger Initiative in New York State.

In light of all the learning happening around credible messenger mentoring, a partnership was formed with CUNY Graduate Center, Community Connections for Youth and NYC DOP; this was named the Credible Messenger Justice Center. The CMJC was a response to this growing demand of all around interest in this kind of transformative mentoring. Knowing that effective partnerships between system and community stakeholders are the key to sustaining juvenile justice reforms; the center built its work. Interest from other agency officials, probation leaders, judges, community partners, etc., from many places like San Diego, Seattle, Maine, Pennsylvania, Georgia, to name a few, have all traveled to NYC to learn about credible messenger mentoring and the partnership that leads to them. The recent move to end the program and other antithetical decisions have led to the breakdown of that partnership that formed the CMJC.

The reach of this work has taken shape in New York State as a whole. For example, the NYS Office of Children and Families, who is in charge of placing youth in facilities upstate, took to heart the success of Arches and the nationwide call to create partnerships that would not only hire credible messengers, but build the capacity of the neighborhood grassroots organizations they come from. OCFS, who for juvenile justice



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advocates represents one of the most rigid and difficult to reform systems, took on a credible messenger approach and funded a \$10 millions dollar state-wide initiative (Community Credible Messenger Initiative) that would allow youth returning home to be mentored in their communities by credible messengers. It puzzles me that, of all institutions, OCFS would see the value in credible messenger mentoring for what is considered the “hardest to reach” youth and that the DOP would, in one fell swoop, knock down a credible messenger based program.

On a final note, the DOP, through a competitive process, selected CCFY, a grassroots community-based organization to be the training provider to the Arches providers. The Urban Institute’s study specifically cited the importance of CCFY’s role as a training and TA provider, and more importantly an intermediary between the Department of Probation and the community organizations contracted to deliver the intervention. Our training contract was more than just about the skills and knowledge of mentoring youth; our value was our own reliability/credibility to the work and system partnerships. We train credible messengers from our personal life experiences with the justice-system, from our lived experience of working with justice involved youth and from our professional experience of building system-community partnerships. The cut of this program has been a signal to us that the Commissioner does not value the organizational resources and allies located in the communities she is most highly tethered to, that is those neighborhoods with the highest numbers of youth on probation. This move has not only placed quality and accessible mentoring further out of reach for already under-resourced/under-supported youth, but has also cut at viable employment opportunities and funding opportunities for under-resourced communities. I am uncertain how further destabilizing communities in this way leads to more community safety.

To this end, I am demanding that NEXT Steps reinstated and that steps towards healing the fractured system-community relationships be taken.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.

In gratitude,
Belinda Ramos
CCFY Interim Executive Director

I would like to thank Chair Carlina Rivera and the Committee on Criminal Justice for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of the Next STEPS Mentoring Program.

My name is Julie Defina and I am the Senior Director of Justice Programs at Community Mediation Services in Queens. My agency has been the service provider for the Next STEPS contract at Queensbridge Houses since the program's inception in 2014. We have maintained a consistent partnership with the Department of Probation since 2011, as we have been contracted on six past and current probation-funded programs.

For the past 12 years, the Department of Probation has been an excellent partner and highly supportive of vulnerable populations they serve – be it justice-involved individuals or larger community of residents living in neighborhoods with high rates of crime. For this reason, the decision to abruptly end Next STEPS was shocking and incredibly disappointing.

Next STEPS has served young adults between the ages of 16-24 who reside in targeted NYCHA developments across the five boroughs. Last week, the Department of Probation released a statement to the media claiming that every single Next STEPS participant will be able to get mentorship support through other city-funded programs – and this statement highlighted three program examples to support this claim. The Commissioner reiterated this message, with the same suggested programs, during her testimony. While these other programs are successful and are valuable to the purpose and population they serve, most Next STEPS participants would not qualify for enrollment in any one of them. One of these programs primarily serves young people on probation with limited spots in each borough. This contract has not received additional funding to absorb an influx from Next STEPS. Another program serves only girls, and the third program serves a younger age range who have an interest in sports. The failure to offer more practical examples of options presumably indicates a level of acknowledgement that suitable alternatives are lacking.

We can all agree that successful mentoring programs are tailored to specific needs and do not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. To that end, Next STEPS is NOT a “redundant” program and there are many unique aspects that have set this program aside from others. For one, our mentors have a heavy presence in the developments they serve. They look for participants – which consists largely of young people who are not interested in joining programs and wouldn't likely seek out support on their own. These incredible mentors are trusted in these communities and are equipped to identify and address needs specific to these neighborhoods. Our programs enroll young people who are truly disconnected – not enrolled in school and not working – those who have the highest chance,

statistically speaking, of becoming justice-involved. The goal of the program is to *prevent* these young people from traveling that path. We provide exposure to new opportunities and our teams avail themselves to assisting young people through challenges and barriers. Our mentors have 24/7 availability and are a phone call away when a participant is in need. They often make themselves available to meet with a young person at hour of the day if possible. When young people don't show up for groups or individual sessions, our mentors knock on their doors, speak to their families and friends whom they've come to know, and take measures to extend additional supports that other programs simply don't have the capacity or structure to offer.

Our teams have been highly successful in reconnecting out-of-school youth to education programs and assisting mentees in connecting to employment opportunities. Our participants have achieved countless educational, professional, and personal goals with the help of their mentors. Next STEPS has undoubtedly prevented young people from being arrested and has likely even saved lives. Our communities are safer, and New York City has received a positive return on its investment in this program.

The Commissioner cites a lack of data as the sole reason to cancel the contract. Our agencies regularly submit requested data, and often provide additional outcome-related information in our narrative reports. It is not reasonable to abruptly end a program when a simple solution to request additional data is an option.

I would like to urge the council to continue to support the full reinstatement of the Next STEPS mentoring program. Thank you.

Julie Defina
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Testimony of Good Shepherd Services
Before the New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice

Submitted by
Peleya Patterson, VP of Justice Initiatives
Good Shepherd Services

September 29, 2023

Thank you, Chair Carlina Rivera and the Members of the Committee on Criminal Justice for the opportunity to testify on the Department of Probation's decision to abruptly terminate the Next STEPS mentoring program in August.

My name is Peleya Patterson, and I am the VP of Justice Initiatives at Good Shepherd Services.

Guided by social and racial justice, Good Shepherd Services (GSS) partners and grows with communities so that all NYC children, youth, and families succeed and thrive. We provide quality, effective services that deepen connections between family members, within schools, and among neighbors. We work closely with community leaders to advocate, both locally and nationally, on behalf of our participants to make New York City a better place to live and work.

Good Shepherd Services is a provider of community-based Youth Justice Programs, Cure Violence, Family Enrichment Centers, and Community Partnership Programs, as well as Community Centers and afterschool programming.

My verbal testimony will focus on the need for the Council to continue to help us demand that the Department of Probation **reinstate the Next Steps Mentoring Program** and help us protect programs funded by DOP that support youth across New York City.

We are truly dedicated to the young people and communities of NYC, and Next STEPS is a part of those communities. Each and every day we meet our young people where they are, in their communities, and that is why it is so important that we reinvest in these programs. Our communities have the solutions to the issues facing our young people.

At a time like this when we are in crisis and our young people are under attack, we should not be removing services for youth programming in our New York City community. Instead we should be investing more in young people and in our communities so that young people and communities can thrive and grow.

Next Steps existed because there are people in our communities who care and are invested. Next Steps is successful because we are built on credible messengers. People in our communities who actually care, who are actually concerned, who are actually invested in the concerns of the NYCHA developments that we're all living in right now. A huge part of the Next STEPS mentoring program is exposure and expansion. We expose young people to new experiences to expand their horizons. This is done **through college visits, cultural events, entrepreneurial programming and day-to-day individual case management.**

Our young people are facing so many issues right now, and we need to reinvest in them, not take resources away. There is an urgency for young people's tomorrow. The urgency for young people's needs, cares, concerns start at a program like NextSTEPS.

We need Mayor Adams and Commissioner Holmes to reinstate Next Steps immediately!

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Send to: testimony@council.nyc.gov

Testimony of Good Shepherd Services
Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

Submitted by
LuAnne Blaauboer and I am the Vice President of Vocational Programs at Good Shepherd Services.

September 29, 2023

Thank you, Chair Carlina Rivera and Committee on Criminal Justice for the opportunity to testify.

My name is LuAnne Blaauboer, and I am the Vice President of Vocational Programs at Good Shepherd Services.

Guided by social and racial justice, Good Shepherd Services (GSS) partners and grows with communities so that all NYC children, youth, and families succeed and thrive. We provide quality, effective services that deepen connections between family members, within schools, and among neighbors. We work closely with community leaders to advocate, both locally and nationally, on behalf of our participants to make New York City a better place to live and work.

Good Shepherd Services has several contracts with DOP including Next Steps, which was abruptly terminated on August 24th, Works Plus and others.

My testimony today will focus on the Works Plus Programs, which I oversee at Good Shepherd, and which resemble Next Steps in terms of size, and funding dollars. I am concerned about the future of these programs. I am here today to underscore the value of these small, community-specific programs that support vulnerable populations like justice-involved, or out-of-school- out-of-work youth.

Our Works Plus Programs provide job and career readiness; and job access services to over 50 young adults living in the Bronx each year. Many of whom are referred to us by our Cure Violence partner, Bronx Rises Against Gun Violence, or BRAG. These programs are highly local – meaning that each program serves young people within a single precinct – we are literally finding and meeting participants where they are at. The programs are also high-touch, meaning that we serve young people in small settings, enabling us to provide intensive, individualized supports and services to each participant. These features are important because we are serving youth who are most at risk of falling through the cracks – including those who are disconnected from school or work, whose lives have been disrupted by contact with the criminal justice

system, and who live in communities that are suffering from the long-term impacts of institutionalized racism.

If we want to move the needle on poverty, on recidivism, or on community violence, then programs like Works Plus are a crucial part of the solution. We are a vital link in the system of opportunities, because without us, those who need resources the most, are in the MOST danger of being left behind. When young people have no faith in the system, it's not likely that they are going to go out of their way to connect to opportunities attached to that same system. But we know them. We know their community, we know their friends and neighbors – we know their dreams, and those dreams don't always include cookie cutter offerings from government officials like getting their CDL as the Commissioner touted. It's their connection to our programs, our staff, that clears the way for their connection to jobs, to careers, to their futures. For our participants, we are their bridge from "what is" to "what comes next."

Lastly, I want to once again ask the council to help us reinstate the Next Steps Mentoring Program and help us to protect programs funded by DOP that **not only** support youth across New York City **who are on probation but also prevent youth from ever touching the system.**

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.



**Presented before the New York City Council
Committee on Criminal Justice
Oversight Hearing: Department of Correction and Department of Probation's
Programming and Reentry Services
September 29, 2023**

Thank you, Chair Carlina Rivera for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the Department of Correction and Department of Probation's Programming and Reentry Services.

The Housing Solutions of New York (HSNY), formerly known as the Bronx Parent Housing Network, is committed to ending homelessness in New York City. We accomplish our mission by delivering essential support services, as well as creating holistic paths to employment and stability so that individuals and families experiencing homelessness can secure and retain safe, clean, affordable, and permanent housing. In addition to addressing homelessness, we also support individuals who are at risk for involvement with the criminal justice system through our Work Plus Program.

Potential Funding Cuts to Vital Programming & Services

We understand that this is a challenging time for our city. With COVID 19 federal funding ending and rising asylum seeker related costs, New York City is facing a dire financial challenge. We commend Speaker Adam's and the Council for their leadership in supporting our city during this challenging time. We appreciate the Mayoral administration's efforts to stabilize the city's budget as well as address the present crisis. The administration's most recent efforts include requiring all city agencies to implement a [5 percent](#) reduction in city funding spending, through a Program to Eliminate the Gap. We are concerned about the implications of these cuts, especially cuts related to the department of probation (DOP) programming. Probation services provide many benefits to individuals and society at large-- it keeps individuals in the community and is more cost-effective than incarceration. The success of probation services relies significantly on the resources society is able to provide individuals on probation.

Throughout our city, nonprofits like HSNY, provide vital programming and services to prevent recidivism and future incarceration-- our services help keep our city safe.

HSNY Work Plus Program

The Housing Solutions of New York is pleased to be one of [fourteen](#) New York City providers offering flexible work readiness wrap-around services to young adults aged 16 to 30 who have been impacted by gun violence through the DOP's Work Plus Program. This program offers an array of services to improve work readiness and employability and it offers individualized

support with developing soft skills, basic life skills, family strengthening, economic opportunity/employment, and social networking and community benefit projects. The HSNY Work Plus Program serves individuals in the catchment area of the 42nd Precinct, and using a cohort model HSNY currently has 13 youth enrolled.

Given our experience of operating the Work Plus Program for three years, we know firsthand how important these services are for young people and the community. Working collaboratively with the 42nd Precinct, the Work Plus program has made an impact on 40 youth-serving high school dropouts to high school graduates with a 98.3% minority population and all participants are low-income students. Our program specializes in youth engagement, community involvement, and work readiness. The HSNY Work Plus program also has partnered with the Connections to Cares: Building Resilience in Youth Program that launched in September 2022. This program partnership now highlights work readiness, employment preparation as well and mental health services. The Works Plus is an attendance incentive program that allows us to continue to connect to the school, conduct home visits, and stay motivated to graduate and be prepared for their career or educational journey.

Recommendations

We urge the city to cancel plans to cut funding for programs that support individuals on probation. Programs like the Work Plus program provide an opportunity for individuals to reintegrate into society, and even the DOP states that Work Plus can reduce the risk of long-term violence. Instead of reducing funding for programs, the city should be increasing support for this program. We recommend that the city adopts a more holistic approach for the Work Plus program by integrating strategies that work. For example, DOP could integrate the Connections to Care (C2C) program into the Work Plus program model to help pair young people with mental health services and support. We know that many criminal justice involved individuals endure mental health challenges and this strategy could make this vital program even more impactful.

Again, we know that this is a challenging time for our city, *and* we also know that this is not a time to cut programs that make our city a safer place to live.

Thank you again for your partnership and the opportunity to submit written today.

Please contact Dr. Xellex Z. Rivera at x.rivera@hsofny.org with any questions regarding this testimony.

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Testimony of Megan French-Marcelin, Senior Director of NYS Policy at Legal Action Center
New York City Council
Committee on Criminal Justice
Oversight Hearing: Department of Correction and Department of Probation's
Programming and Reentry Services.
September 29, 2023

Thank you to Chairwoman Rivera and the members of the committee. My name is Megan French-Marcelin and I am the Senior Director of New York Policy at the Legal Action Center. I appreciate the opportunity to address you today.

I am representing the New York City Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) and Reentry Coalition. The coalition is comprised of eleven organizations, all of which run alternatives to detention and incarceration and reentry programs here in New York City. These programs are community-based, people-centered, holistic supports that connect people to care from which they have often been historically and intentionally marginalized. Our programs provide mental health care, treatment for substance use disorders, housing assistance, employment and education services, youth mentoring, and legal support. Our clients are youth and seniors, women and queer and gender non-conforming persons, people with serious mental illness and people who use drugs, houseless people and people in poverty. Collectively, we provide supports to over 25, 000 New Yorkers every year.

New York City has benefited from our long standing, evidence based programs that have successfully diverted people from incarceration, lowered rates of re-arrest and extended new opportunities to individuals across New York. Three-quarters of our ATI participants have avoided rearrest, and alternatively, benefitted from job training, mentoring, and pathways to education.

Despite the success of these programs, we have collectively witnessed a series of funding cuts and program terminations that have had and will continue to have a disastrous effect on our clients and our ability to safely decarcerate the jails on Rikers Island ahead of its scheduled legal closure. The approved FY24 budget slashed \$17 million from programs on Rikers, led by providers including two members of the coalition (Osborne Association and Fortune Society). These cuts interrupted critical programming for incarcerated individuals, many of whom will be released into ATI or reentry programs with these same organizations, and undermined service-based interventions that have contributed to positive outcomes for incarcerated New Yorkers. Just this month, the Department of Probation announced that they would be ending the Next STEPS program - a mentoring program for youth in NYCHA housing developments that focused on interrupting pathways to criminal legal involvement. Despite evidence that mentoring has not only fostered community safety, but reduced youth arrests, the City has shuttered yet another successful program. And this week, our partners got word of yet another programmatic cut, this time to the IMPACT program - a mentoring program for youth with criminal legal system involvement. The 175 youth that the program was designed to serve are now at risk of detention.

For ATI and reentry providers, it is hard not to see this series of actions as a sign of what is to come - continued cuts to evidence-based, community-led programs and a return to a draconian style "law and order" that did not keep our communities safe in the 1990s and will not today. In fact, continued cuts of this nature will only further entrench already existing inequalities and

increase our reliance on mass incarceration. This is true even as ATIs are significantly cheaper to fund and operate. While it costs \$500,000 per person per year to incarcerate someone at Rikers, ATI's cost just between \$8,000-\$10,000 per person per year. Why then are we cutting essential services that have been successful modalities to ensure public safety.

We cannot use incarceration to deal with inequities in access to treatment and care. Rikers is already the largest psychiatric provider in New York City; over half (53%) of people detained have a Brad H classification; more than one-fifth of incarcerated individuals have a serious mental illness; 25% of people at Rikers are homeless; and 41% would qualify for supportive housing. These data alone demonstrate the clear need for upstream investments in preventive, alternative, and reentry services that center public health and supportive services. We should be pouring more funding - not less - into alternatives to incarceration and detention, into community based mental health and substance use treatment services, and into holistic, wraparound reentry supports.

We must be proactive. New York must invest in the wellbeing of communities - primarily Black, brown, and low-income - that have suffered from decades of disinvestment and public retrenchment. There is a clear consensus in the scientific literature about what works to produce public safety - access to stable housing and employment, community-based, community-led mental health services and substance use treatment, youth mentoring, violence interruption, and peer supports. Let's get to work.

Thank you.

Good morning and thank you to the Committee on Criminal Justice and chairperson Carlina Rivera for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Takeasha Newton and I am a Lead Community Organizer with The Legal Aid Society and a member of the Vote in NYC Jails Coalition, a coalition founded in 2020 out of the need to provide eligible New Yorkers detained at Rikers Island and other NYC jails access to the ballot. In partnership with the Legal Aid Society, our coalition members have been advocating for the voting rights of those held on bail and awaiting case resolution in a NYC jail since 2016. As you may be aware, the law in NY state provides that a person maintains their right to vote EXCEPT while serving time on a felony sentence. Because Rikers Island and other NYC jails are pre-trial detention facilities, the vast majority of the 6,198 NYers at these facilities are held pre-trial or are serving a sentence on a misdemeanor, and therefore maintain their right to vote. However, because of their physical confinement in a jail setting, they can not access the ballot as other NYers can. They can not walk to a polling site in their community to vote early or cast their ballot on Election Day. They can not even request an absentee ballot without the support of others.

In the 2020 general election, there were approximately 11,600 unsentenced detainees eligible to vote throughout the state, and only an estimated 0.5% voted, which is 69.2% below the average in the general population. And although they are legally entitled access to absentee ballots, the above turnout numbers suggest a systemic problem. Further, our experience working with eligible voters detained at Rikers Island has revealed the time frames prescribed for an absentee ballot to be requested and returned naturally excludes those entering a detention facility close to an election day while logistical impediments out of the detained person's control still routinely prevent those who successfully request an absentee ballot from having their vote counted.

Despite these infringements on detained voters' right to vote in this state, the Board of Elections does not believe they are required to ensure access to the ballot for incarcerated NYers, and thus our coalition was created out of the need to ensure all eligible NYers could participate each election cycle. Monthly our non-partisan volunteers visit a facility at Rikers Island to register voters and provide absentee ballot request forms. Forms are collected by our volunteers and taken by a DOC official to the Board of Elections office. Then, when an election occurs, that DOC official collects the absentee ballots from the BOE, distributes them throughout Rikers, and then collects the ballots after the incarcerated individual votes. This multi-step process is a challenge for many reasons, and while our presence and assistance in NYC jails is an improvement from no access at all for incarcerated NYers, the solution we provide is still inadequate. Our coalition has registered thousands of voters, but each election cycle we see hundreds of incarcerated individuals attempt to cast their ballot only to have their right to vote denied. *In June of this year, 215 absentee ballots were cast, and yet only 32 were counted.*

All eligible NYers deserve real ballot access, and our coalition will continue to advocate that the voices of the incarcerated are heard and counted. We ask for your support to ensure that voting remains a priority within NYC jails. The best way to provide real ballot access in New York jails is to put polling places within them. We ask for your support in calling on the state legislature to provide jail-based polling places in all NY jails so that each NYer has an equal opportunity to have their voice heard. And in the meantime, we ask that NYC facilities provide voter education materials in each housing facility to ensure every voter has access to information about upcoming elections and how to cast their ballot.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and we look forward to continuing to work together.



Living Redemption Community Development Corporation
dba Living Redemption Youth Opportunity Hub

302 W. 124th Street
New York, NY 10027

Testimony of Living Redemption Community Development Corporation
Before the New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice

Submitted by
Rev. Maurice Winley, Founder & President/CEO
Living Redemption Community Development Corporation
September 26, 2023

Thank you, Chair Carlina Rivera and the Members of the Committee on Criminal Justice for the opportunity to testify on the Department of Probation's decision to abruptly terminate the Next STEPS mentoring program in August.

My name is Maurice Winley and I am Founder & President/CEO at Living Redemption Community Development Corporation (LRCDC)

LRCDC operates 5 city funded programs in the Harlem Community. Our mission is Saving Lives and Healing Communities One Relationship at a Time. Below, please find our historical operational data:

**Next Steps – St. Nicholas Houses
Historic Data**

1/2015 - 8/2023

		%
# served	192	
# connected to Employment	74	39%
# HS Grads	110	57%
# College Enrollment	11	6%
Males	158	82%
Females	34	18%

Services Received	Services Engaged In	
<i>Educational/Literary Services</i>	144	75%
<i>Employment Services</i>	161	84%
<i>Peer and/or Group Mentoring</i>	192	100%
<i>Health Services</i>	96	50%
<i>Family strengthening services</i>	144	75%
<i>Criminal justice prevention and support</i>	192	100%
<i>Housing Assistance</i>	87	45%

- I have overseen this program since 2015.
- This closure has directly impacted 5 LRCDC employees working on this grant and 5 participants enrolled in the program as of August 2023.
- OUR ASK –Reinstate the Next Steps Mentoring Program and help us protect programs funded by DOP that support Youth across New York City.
- **Mentors** help youth connect to education and career opportunities, provide youth with a trusted adult who can support them in challenging times, and help guide youth as they navigate decisions and enter adulthood.
- NextSTEPS programs have been operating for 9 years also employ community members also known as credible messengers, providing them with an opportunity to achieve both economic stability and mobility.
- Participants Served Annually: Approximately 200 annually.
- The NextSTEPS Mentoring Program serves hundreds of young people ages 16-24 who reside in NYCHA housing every year.
- NextSTEPS mentors connect young NYCHA residents with education & career opportunities.
- At least 40 staff members at the contracted providers will lose their jobs, with less than one week of notice.
- Each NextSTEPS site costs only about \$150,000 per year, a small sum compared to the immense value of the program.
- There is historical data that supports the need and continued need for this program resulting in the MAP for neighborhood safety.
- Investing in youth keeps communities safe!
- Divesting in Community with no sensible replacement will have collateral damage and cause harm.

About Next STEPS

Next STEPS is an initiative of the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety (MAP for Neighborhood Safety) that offers one-on-one and group mentoring within a cognitive behavioral therapy-based curriculum designed to help young adults (ages 16-24) make the attitudinal and behavioral changes necessary to avoid criminal activity and reengage with education, work and community. The Department of Probation contracts with nonprofit organizations in targeted neighborhoods to provide a transformative mentoring designed intervene at a critical point in the lives of young adults who are: actively engaged and/or involved in serious violent activity (including domestic violence) and/or gang - affiliated, who reside in or near targeted NYCHA (New York City Housing Authority) housing developments throughout New York City. Youth who are part of the program are not on probation. This program is a preventive program.

The core components of the Next STEPS model include:

- Group process that encourages participants to become an important support system for each other.
- Curriculum based on cognitive behavioral principles delivered by culturally appropriate mentors, "credible messengers".
- Mentors who are available for intensive support, advice, and guidance.
- Incorporation of positive youth development values, principles, and practices.
- Case management.
- Participant stipends.

The Issue: Despite mentorship being included in the Mayor's Blueprint for Public Safety, NextSTEPS mentoring contracts were canceled. After hearing the terrible news, our participants and their families are devastated, and our organizations have not been given enough time to smoothly transition them into other supportive programs. Many have said they feel abandoned by the City and hopeless about their ability to stay out of the criminal legal system without the support of their mentors.

Testimony to NYC City Council Committee on Criminal Justice

Public Hearing

September 29, 2023

Moses EL-Sun White
Senior Case Manager
Children, Youth & Family Services



Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Moses EL-Sun White. I am Senior Case Manager in the Children, Youth & Family Services division at Osborne Association. Osborne is a 90-year-old nonprofit dedicated to transforming the criminal legal system and supporting individuals, families, and communities affected by incarceration.

Since 2014, Osborne has provided Next STEPS programming at Butler and Castle Hill Houses in the Bronx, serving more than 350 young people aged 16-24 and their families. Next STEPS is unique for its onsite mentoring services in NYCHA developments with the highest rates of violence and arrest in New York City.

Next STEPS was launched as part of the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. It is a modified version of the Arches program, using an evidence-based interactive journaling curriculum that is anchored in cognitive behavioral principles and delivered by mentors known as credible messengers. These highly trained professionals have backgrounds similar to the populations they serve, often including prior criminal justice system involvement.

We know this combination of evidence-based curriculum and credible messenger mentoring works. An evaluation of Arches, conducted by the Urban Institute and funded by the Office for Economic Opportunity, showed that participants were significantly less likely to be reconvicted of a crime compared to peers. It showed gains in participants' self-perception, emotion regulation, and future orientation. And it demonstrated that staff created a family-like atmosphere through 24/7, one-on-one support.

I have seen firsthand the impact of Next STEPS on young adults. Many are struggling to find their way in the world, due to experiences of trauma, violence, and racism. They rely on us for guidance on all kinds of issues - family relationships, finding work, and more - and we are here for them every step of the way. We provide job readiness training, resume building, educational and professional development, and transformative mentoring in a safe space. We cross gang boundaries to create breakthroughs, and we are active in our mentees' lives long after they graduate.

One former mentee, Sha'Quinn, says that without the support that credible messengers provided, he would have nothing but the streets. With our guidance, he developed the skills to get his life on track. He got his driver's license, built a resume, and secured employment. He is now a thriving young man who is gainfully employed with a family of his own. Sha'Quinn's success is a testament to the power of this program to help participants build a brighter future for themselves. This program accomplishes the very goals outlined in the Mayor's [Blueprint for Community Safety](#).

Despite the demonstrated positive outcomes of Next STEPS, we were given just a few days' notice of the program's cancellation. When we broke the news to the young people, they blamed themselves. They asked us: What did we do wrong? Who can we talk to now?

I put those same questions to you today: What did they do wrong? Who can they talk to now?

We believe in the transformative power of mentoring from skilled credible messengers. We urge the Department of Probation to restore this critical program. A decade-plus of investment to tackle disparities and ensure that all young people share in the promise of success must not go to waste.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Testimony of The Children's Village
Before the New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice

Submitted by
Arnell Jackson, Program Manager
The Children's Village

September 28, 2023

Thank you, Chair Carlina Rivera and the Members of the committee on Criminal Justice for the opportunity to testify on the Department of Probation's decision to abruptly terminate the Next STEPS program in August.

My name is Arnell Jackson, and I was the program manager of the Next STEPS program at the Polo Grounds Housing Complex in Harlem. I have been involved with the Next steps program since its inception in 2014. To be honest, I was shocked to find out that the program would be ending without proper notice. In effect, giving us less than a week to provide closure for our young people, search for viable resources, and look for other employment opportunities for credible messengers.

One of the key principles that our program stresses with our participants is effective communication. We also go out of our way to make sure that the young people at Polo Grounds Next STEPS have a voice when it comes to decisions that impact their lives. I'm sure you can understand how difficult it was to explain to the mentees that they in fact have no say in a decision that will surely impact their immediate future.

What makes the Next STEPS mentoring program unique was the fact that a young person didn't need to be on probation to attend. Allowing them to become part of something positive without a referral from probation or the court system.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

We are all aware of what it costs to jail and feed an inmate for a year. and there is no conclusive evidence that locking someone away will help them. Employing credible messengers who have lived experience affords the mentor the opportunity to gain employment and help the very communities that they once harmed.

In the zoom meeting with commissioner Holmes, it was mentioned that we would take our groups to the movies. I would argue that if a participant is at the movies for two hours, that's two hours away from the influence of the streets with a credible messenger. The Polo grounds Next STEPS mentors held a two-part workshop on the cultural significance

of the movie Black Panther and how the use of comics can improve literacy skills. It also sparked conversations about Race, Gender, and Colonialism. A number of our mentees are “Visual learners”, and literacy can be achieved in a number of ways.

Please see link below from the Harvard Graduate school of Education (March 2018)

<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ideas/usable-knowledge/18/03/black-panther-classroom>

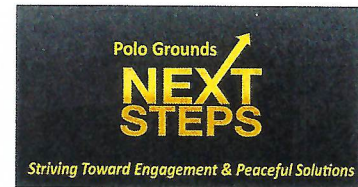
In the time that Children’s Village has run the Polo Grounds Next steps program, we have been able to assist participants with obtaining City Identification, State Id’s, and Driver’s Licenses. With the help of The Children’s Village Mentoring Division, we were able to get 6 Passports for mentees in 2022 alone. Our groups have taken trips to Baltimore to Visit Morgan State this past August. In 2022 we Visited Philadelphia and Took mentees to Toronto Canada in 2018 & 2019. Considering that some of them had never been on a plane, this was a life altering experience where they learned about different currency exchange rates, met people of color who lived outside the United States, and visited Ryerson University in Downtown Toronto. Travel Booklets were created for each trip so that the group would be part of the process and learn what was necessary to plan a trip like this.

There were also workshops created by the mentors like *Resume Writing, Job Interviewing skills, and Grooming workshops* where instructional manuals were created for the mentees to follow.

After a discussion about our community, the staff decided to have the mentees meet and patronize all minority owned businesses. Giving them a chance to experience what it was like to start and maintain a small business.

These Next STEPS Programs help our participants, our mentors, and our communities. We ask that the Department of Probation reinstate Next STEPS and allow us to continue our mission of providing guidance, mentorship, and hope to youth in the communities where these services are needed the most.

Thank You for your time.



September 7, 2023

Commissioner Juanita Holmes

New York City Department of Probation

New York, New York

Dear Commissioner Holmes,

The Polo Grounds Next STEPS Staff and mentees were shocked to find out that the program would be shut down as of August 31st. In effect, giving us less than a week to "finish program." This would involve closure with the young people, referring mentees to alternative programs for services, termination / restructuring of employment for mentors, Moving supplies, and several other program related changes.

One of the key principles that our program stresses with our participants is effective communication. We also go out of our way to make sure that the young people at Polo Grounds Next STEPS have a voice when it comes to changes that impact their lives. I'm sure you can understand how difficult it is to explain to the program participants that they in fact have no say in this decision. A decision that will surely impact their immediate future.

In our time at Polo Grounds, the Next STEPS Program has been able to provide the opportunity for our participants to obtain passports and leave the country on 2 separate occasions. During our trips we have taken young people to visit universities in Philadelphia, Baltimore and Toronto Canada. Opportunities like this don't present themselves to our young people often. Travel changes a mentee's perspective on the world and their place in it.

We ask that you reconsider the August 31st program closure and allow Next STEPS to continue its mission of providing guidance, mentorship, and hope to youth in communities that have very little in the way of resources.

Below are the signatures of the staff and current mentees of the Polo Grounds Next STEPS Program.

Next STEPS Staff:

Foster Scott

Dr. [Signature]

X

Arnell Jackson

Arnell Jackson
Program Manager

Next STEPS Mentees:

Desire Valentine

Tanya Dupont

Victoria Darko

Janet Valentine

Emanti Riley

Darntae Evans

Rueck Mitchell

Tatjana Dupont

Zaria Lewis

TRINITY CHURCH WALL STREET

09.29.23 - Trinity Church Testimony - New York City Council Criminal Justice Committee Oversight Hearing

Dear Chair Rivera and Members of the Committee on Criminal Justice:

My name is Natasha Lifton, Managing Director of External Affairs and Special Projects at Trinity Church Wall Street. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for this oversight hearing on reentry services provided by the Department of Correction and the Department of Probation's programming. My comments will focus on reentry services.

Trinity Church Wall Street is an Episcopal Church in Lower Manhattan with a congregation of more than 1,600 parishioners, who come from all five boroughs and form an ethnically, racially, and economically diverse congregation. In addition to our ministry, we carry out the mission of faith and social justice through direct services, grantmaking, and advocacy.

Trinity has a long history of advancing social justice in alignment with our belief that every person is created in the image of God and has dignity and value. Trinity has a particular focus on strengthening the well-being of young people, families, and our community, particularly as our city strives for an equitable recovery, recognizing that those hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout are Black and brown New Yorkers.

In 2020, Trinity formed Faith Communities for Just Reentry, a coalition of over 40 faith organizations working to improve the reentry process for those leaving jails and prisons so they can reconnect with their families and rebuild their lives. This includes ensuring access to critical services and supports such as housing, health and mental health care, education, and job training and placement. Such a comprehensive and coordinated system of reentry services has a profound impact on those returning home and their families, while making our communities safer.

We commend the New York City Council for its commitment to addressing the challenges faced by those who have been justice-involved and for its efforts to improve the services provided by the Department of Correction. In this vein, we respectfully urge the Council to take the following actions:

TRINITY CHURCH WALL STREET

- 1. Ensure that every person released from City jails has valid identification and essential documents by passing [Int 1092-2023](#) and [Int 0548-2022](#).** Individuals are often released from jail without their personal belongings, including IDs, or lacked valid identification to begin with. ID cards are critical for accessing housing, public benefits, and other supports. These pieces of legislation would mandate that the DOC assist those in its custody obtain IDNYC cards, as well as documents such as school transcripts and social security cards prior to release which can be used to prove identify and secure identification.
- 2. Work with the Administration to Restore \$17 million cut from the DOC's budget for in-custody services.** These services, provided by experienced, culturally competent community-based organizations, included hard skills training and certifications and mental health and recovery supports including group sessions and cognitive behavioral interventions which must be provided by highly trained staff to be effective. These in-custody programs are an essential first step along a continuum of care that extends into and helps stabilize communities. One provider, the Fortune Society, analyzed data for individuals discharged from City jails in 2022 and eligible for transitional services and found that those they worked with while detained were five times more likely to enroll in the organization's services after release than those they did not work with while in jail. These services must be restored immediately.
- 3. Increase access to stable housing for those released from City jails.** A substantial number of formerly incarcerated New Yorkers cycle in and out of the shelter system, hampering their ability to rebuild their lives and reducing safety. To address this, more must be done to connect the formerly incarcerated to safe, stable housing. Trinity provided testimony during the FY 24 budget hearing recommending more funding for supportive and transitional housing for New Yorkers with histories of justice system involvement. We continue to call for these increased investments. They will save money in the long run by reducing homelessness and recidivism, a key benefit given the strains on the City's shelter system and budget. Lastly, while not under the purview of the DOC, we urge the council to end housing discrimination against people with conviction records to support stability and reduce recidivism by passing the Fair Chance for Housing Act.

In conclusion, we urge the Council to continue its commitment to improving the City's reentry services through targeted legislation and investing in comprehensive, evidence-based programs that prioritize the unique needs of each individual, promote well-being, and increase safety for all New Yorkers

Thank you for your consideration.



Mental Health Project

New York City Council
Committee on Criminal Justice

Oversight Hearing - Department of Correction and Department of Probation Programming and Reentry Services

Friday, September 29, 2023
Council Chambers, City Hall, New York, NY

Testimony of
Jennifer J. Parish
Director of Criminal Justice Advocacy
Urban Justice Center Mental Health Project
(###) ###-#### • jparish@urbanjustice.org

Good afternoon. Thank you for holding this hearing on programming and reentry services and for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Jennifer Parish, and I am the director of criminal justice advocacy at the Urban Justice Center Mental Health Project, and a member of the Jails Action Coalition and #HALTsolitary Campaign. The Mental Health Project advocates for people with mental health concerns involved in the criminal legal system. We represent the *Brad H. Class*, all incarcerated individuals who receive mental health treatment while in NYC jails, which is currently more than half of the city jail population.

Preventive Services, Community Supports, and Emergency Reentry Housing

Currently the Administration is moving in the opposite direction from where we need to go to create a fairer criminal legal system and reduce the jail population. For many years New York City had been moving away from mass incarceration and reducing the number of people in jail – demonstrating that incarceration does not make the city safer as New York City is one of the safest big cities in the country. We made this progress through a number of initiatives, but a crucial one is providing preventive services in the community and funding community providers who can intervene to create safety by addressing underlying needs and behavior to prevent arrest and incarceration.

But instead of building on those successes and continuing to reduce the jail population, this Administration is defunding the very services that have contributed to this decades-long decrease in the use of incarceration – and the number of people incarcerated is now more than 6,100, an increase of more than 760 people since Mayor Adams took office. New York City will suffer the consequences of these decisions. Currently the City spends more than \$550,000 per person per year on incarceration – funds that would be better spent on housing, mental healthcare, education, and job training. The Administration’s decisions demonstrate that they prefer to fund punishment and incarceration, which are harmful to individuals and communities, over the things that make communities safe and healthy.

The Administration has also turned away from the Emergency Reentry Hotel program established during the pandemic. This emergency housing resulted in many people being released from NYC jails, and increased the number of people who could participate in alternatives to incarceration. This housing was a way to safely decarcerate. While the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice has shifted to funding transitional housing, which is certainly needed, this housing does not provide the immediate alternative to the shelter system which served individuals with mental health concerns and made judges feel they could safely release people while they await a supportive housing or residential treatment placement. There is currently no immediate, low-barrier housing with supportive services that can accept people upon release from incarceration. In the next budget cycle, the Council should fund an emergency housing option for people released for incarceration and ensure that it provides on-site services so that people with mental health concerns can have a safe place to stay when released from jail.

Jail Programming & Conditions

The Administration is also going in the wrong direction in its operation of the jails. Rather than taking the necessary actions to reduce excessive use of force and violence in the city jails as required by the *Nunez* consent judgment, the Department of Correction has ended programming provided by community-based organizations. It is well established that reducing idle time in jail contributes to reductions in violence. Yet the Department has stopped funding these programs which gave individuals hope, developed skills to help them when they return to the community, and provided them with an activity during the days and months they spent in jail awaiting resolution of the charges against them.

The Department of Correction’s inability to operate the jails in a safe and orderly manner and ensure that people can access healthcare and discharge planning appointments with Correctional Health Services has resulted in a dramatic decline in the quality of discharge planning provided to people with mental health concerns. Far too many people with mental health challenges are released from incarceration without benefits, treatment, and housing. Even though discharge planning services are mandated by the *Brad H.* settlement agreement, people with mental health concerns continue to be released to the community without appropriate services in place.

In addition, the Department has turned away from Board of Correction rules to reduce solitary confinement in the jails and is currently violating the Humane Alternative to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Law in many ways, such as by placing people in segregated confinement for more than fifteen days, placing people with disabilities and young adults in segregated confinement, not allowing representation at disciplinary hearings, and keeping people in restraints throughout their out-of-cell time without an individualized determination. The Department claims that it is not subject to the HALT Law because it does not hold people in a cell for more than 17 hours a day. But as incarcerated people report and Council Members' and Board of Correction members' visits to housing areas in North Infirmery Command and Enhanced Supervision Housing establish, many people are in fact in segregated confinement as defined in the HALT Law – regardless of the name that DOC calls it.

Enact Intro 549-2022

The City Council can remedy this situation by passing Intro 549-2022, which defines what a cell is and what out-of-cell is so that DOC can no longer hide behind the fiction that being alone in a cage outside one's cell is "out-of-cell" time. The legislation allows for separation but in an environment where underlying issues can be addressed and programming provided – instead of through ineffective isolation which only makes the jails less safe.

Enact Intro 1203-2023

Finally, we support Intro 1203-2023, legislation requiring the Department to provide a letter of incarceration to all individuals released from the Department's custody. This legislation will benefit the clients we serve who have had their Supplemental Security Income (SSI) suspended. The Social Security Administration (SSA) requires individuals to provide proof of their release from custody to have their benefits reinstated. Requiring DOC to provide a letter of incarceration will enable formerly incarcerated people to provide this proof to SSA so that they can have their SSI benefits reinstated more quickly.

**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: 9/29/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ZAKYA WARKENO

Address: _____

I represent: BRONX DEFENDERS

Address: 360 E. 161st ST Bronx 10451

**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: Ahmed Rodriguez

Address: 89-64 163rd Queens NY 11372

I represent: Community Mediation Service

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: 9/29/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ARNELL JACKSON

Address: GRAND CONCOURSE Bx NY

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 09/29/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Andy Collado

Address: 5th Ave, Ozark Park, NY 11417

I represent: Roseboro Community Partnership

Address: 565 Bushwick Ave, BK, NY 11206

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

9/29/23

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/29/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Hubert Lita

Address: 151 Lawrence Street

I represent: Brooklyn Community Services

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: Janelle Ferris

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 9.29.23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Robert MALDONADO

Address: 33 Beaver ST

I represent: Dept of Probation

Address: 33 Beaver St.

**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: Nadia Chait

Address: 4 W 125th Street, NY

I represent: CASES

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: 9/29/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anna Calabrese

Address: 1 Centre Street, NY, 10007

I represent: MOCJ

Address: 1 Centre Street, NY 10007

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**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: 9/29/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jeanette Merrill
Address: 55 Water St., New York, NY 10004
I represent: NYC Health + Hospitals / Correctional
Address: Health Services

**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: 9/29/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kingsley Rowe, Sr Forensic Reentry Social
Address: 100 Williams St, NY NY Worker
I represent: New York Co. Defender Services
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: 9/29/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Suanita N Holmen
Address: 33 Beaver St NY, N.Y.
I represent: DOP
Address: 33 Beaver St. NY 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: 9/29/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Francis Torres

Address: 75-20 ASTORIA BLVD. SUITE 110

I represent: NYC DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

Address: 75-20 ASTORIA BLVD. SUITE 110
EAST ELMHURST NY 11370

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. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kat Thomson

Address: _____

I represent: Dept of Correction (DOC) ^{Brooklyn} NY

Address: 75-20 Astoria Blvd, Queens

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. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9.29.23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Valerie Greisoth

Address: 75-20 Astoria Blvd Suite 110

I represent: NYC Department of Correction

Address: 75-20 Astoria Blvd Suite 110
East Elmhurst NY 11370

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. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/29/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Neil P. McCarty

Address: 75-20 Astoria Blvd, Suite 110, East Elmhurst, NY

I represent: NYC Department of Correction

Address: 75-20 Astoria Blvd, Suite 110, East Elmhurst, NY

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