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### New York City Jails Continue to Become Safer as Violent Incidents Again Decline

The first half of calendar year 2007 was one of the safest six-month periods recorded in the New York City jails and a significant improvement from the same period last year, as violent incidents in the jails continued a historic decline, Correction Commissioner Martin F. Horn announced today.

Slashings and stabbings--considered the key measure of jail violence because they include an assault, the possession of a contraband weapon and the possibility of serious injury-- declined by 39% compared to the first six months of 2006 (from 18 to 11).

At that rate, the city's jails would finish the year with 22 such attacks, significantly fewer than the 29 in 2002, when the jails recorded their lowest total in the years since the Department began tracking such data in 1995.

"The safety conditions in New York's jails are a stark contrast to the past," Commissioner Horn said. "In 1995, there were more than 1,000 stabbings and slashings, compared to the very few so far this year. Jails and prisons will never be totally free from violence, but the correction officers patrolling New York City's jails continue to do a remarkable job of maintaining the care, custody and control of those who are entrusted to them.

"The first right of our inmates is the right to be safe during their incarceration and we are continuing the trend of reducing violence to record low levels," Commissioner Horn said.

Other key measures also reflected improved security in the jails. Inmate-on-inmate injuries fell by 7.7% in the first half of the year. Infractions charged to inmates as a result of inmate-inmate altercations declined by 6.2%.

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Serious assaults on staff decreased by 5.2%. Serious injuries suffered by inmates were reduced by 2%. Written reports of injuries declined by 7%.

Incidents involving the use of force by staff—which is permitted by jail regulations when necessary and appropriate—increased slightly (from 614 to 660) for the period. The increase was primarily the result of the increased use of chemical spray to break up inmate fights. When force is necessary, staff are encouraged to utilize chemical spray first in an effort to avoid physical altercations. The use of force does not suggest that inmates are not safe. In fact, the opposite is often true since many uses of force involve breaking up inmate on inmate altercations.

Once again, there were no inmate escapes, no homicides and just two suicides in the city jails in the period. (Suicides in NYC jails average three to four per year among the more than 100,000 annual jail admissions, compared to a suicide rate of 54 per 100,000 in other jail and prison systems nationally and, according, to the city Department of Health and Mental Health, a suicide rate of 12 per 100,000 among New York City residents.)

Commissioner Horn noted that the safety improvements were all the more impressive because the city's jails—one of the nation's largest systems with an average daily inmate population of about 14,000—receive more than 100,000 inmate admissions every year and many of those individuals have records of violence, drug and alcohol addictions and mental health problems. An estimated 25% of the inmates in the city's custody at any given time suffer from mental illness and many of those require special housing in the jails and intense observation.

Several improved management and correction practices contributed to the increasing safety of the city jails, Commissioner Horn said.

“We are training our correction officers more rigorously than ever to be sensitive to inmates' mental states and we are encouraging and equipping staff to confront violence with the least force necessary, particularly through the use of chemical spray. We track nearly 300 safety and security statistical indicators and investigate every incident that involves the use of force by staff. Cameras in jail corridors, a policy of re-arresting inmates for violent offenses, and state of the art protective equipment have also improved jail security and helped reduce violence and injuries.” Furthermore, he said, the city's jails now employ a more elaborate array of options for housing inmates based on their likelihood to become a threat to other inmates, themselves or staff.

“The general public understands little about jails and prisons and tends to isolate and even forget about these facilities,” Horn said. “But jails are a part of our communities, and so are the men and women inside them. By any reasonable measure, our jails are safer, and we are committed to keeping our staff and inmates safe, and making the jails safer still.”