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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 12, 2015
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MAYOR DE BLASIO, COMMISSIONER PONTE ANNOUNCE 14-POINT RIKERS ANTI-VIOLENCE AGENDA

Five Main Initiatives to Target Growing Inmate-on-Inmate Violence

NEW YORK—Mayor Bill de Blasio and Correction Commissioner Joe Ponte today announced a 14-point plan to aggressively combat violence and promote a culture of safety on Rikers Island, including five main initiatives to target inmate-on-inmate violence. This plan represents the administration’s continued commitment to reform Rikers Island after decades of neglect.

At the heart of the plan are five major initiatives to reduce inmate-on-inmate violence:

- Keeping weapons, drugs and contraband out of Rikers, including visitor reforms
- Creating an integrated classification and housing strategy to more safely house inmates
- Providing comprehensive security camera coverage
- Designing effective inmate education opportunities and services to reduce idle time
- Developing crisis intervention teams to respond more quickly to inmate-on-inmate violence.

Inmate-on-inmate violence has been on the rise at Rikers Island over the past decade, representing 71 percent of all violent incidents for 2014. Thus far in 2015, 711 inmates were involved in an attack on another inmate.

“Today we are taking aggressive steps to move Rikers Island from a culture of violence to a culture of safety. From changing the visitor policy to intercept contraband to smartly placing inmates to avoid conflict to providing our inmates with expanded educational opportunities and services, we are taking on the growing number of violent incidents at Rikers from every angle,” said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. “As we move forward, this 14-point agenda will help us rebuild Rikers as a safer institution for officers and inmates alike.”

“We will aggressively tackle inmate-on-inmate violence by stopping the flow of weapons and drugs into our jails and stanching the flow of information that enables gang members to commit violent acts across facilities,” **Commissioner Ponte** said. “These steps will help us stop violence before it enters our gates.”

Keeping weapons, drugs and contraband out of Rikers will be accomplished through a number of policy changes, including new rules for visitors that DOC will seek from the Board of Correction, its oversight body. These rules will seek to limit the physical contact inmates may have with visitors, broaden the criteria for restricting visitors, and establish a visitor registry. The goal is to create a common sense approach to visiting policy that reviews visits on a case by case basis and limits potential for contraband flow and crime, while respecting the ability of inmates to maintain legitimate ties with family members and the community. These changes would bring DOC policy closer in line with other large jail systems such as Los Angeles, Cook County (Chicago), and Philadelphia, which either place limitations on physical contact between inmates and visitors, or restrict visitors based on security and safety concerns.

Additional contraband policy initiatives include:

- Implementing K-9 capabilities for searches and investigations by June 2016
- Building more, new secure entrances for each facility by December 2018
- Training 100% of existing front entrance staff in enhanced TSA-style procedures by December 2015

Creating an integrated classification and housing strategy will ensure that the toughest, most violent inmates of Rikers are housed with each other, and will separate warring gangs and warring factions within gangs. Presently, some inmates with gang affiliations are housed together, while others are sprinkled throughout the general population.

This integrated classification and housing strategy includes:

- Refining the inmate classification process by April 2015
- Launching initial Housing/Classification pilots in select facilities by October 2015
- Stand-up Housing/Classification Unit to direct Department-wide housing and classification system by January 2016
- Rolling out a new housing and classification system and plan to all facilities by April 2016

Comprehensive security camera coverage will ensure there is active monitoring of jail activities in real time, to deter and respond in a timely manner to violence, and for intelligence purposes, to prevent violence altogether. DOC has installed full camera coverage in adolescent facilities and installed camera coverage in nine of the housing units dedicated to 18-21-year-olds; DOC will add full video and camera coverage within all facilities on Rikers Island by February 2018.

Designing effective inmate education opportunities and services will result in a comprehensive idleness reduction program that envisions an expansion of non-school classes and other activities such as fatherhood initiatives or workforce development, so that all inmates will have the option of attending a minimum of five hours of classes or programming daily, from one hour now. The department expects this should help stop violence by keeping inmates focused on priorities that assist rehabilitation.

The department expects to provide access to a minimum of 5 hours of non-school programming a day to adolescent (16-17) inmates by August 2015; a minimum of 5 hours of programming a day to young adult (18-21) inmates by December 2015; and a minimum of 5 hours of programming a day to adult (22+) inmates by March 2016.

Redefining first line incident responses will more quickly end violent incidents by training over 300 Emergency Services Unit officers on non-lethal force technique and jointly developing Crisis Intervention Teams, involving training 1,000 officers with DOHMH and implementation of teams by July 2015.

Additional initiatives will help move DOC toward a culture of safety. DOC will create and expand common-sense managerial and operational practices to strengthen performance, accountability, ownership and transparency through the following nine initiatives:

- Improve leadership development and culture
- Redefine the Investigations Division
- Design a recruitment, hiring and staff selection plan
- Design a performance management plan
- Implement operational performance metrics and analysis
- Create a well-defined supply distribution process
- Expand targeted training of officers and non-uniformed staff
- Raise facilities to a state of good repair
- Improve custody management

Background on Visitor Policy

From November 14 through January 31, DOC seized 10 weapons and 69 contraband drugs from 26 visitors who were trying to enter jails to visit gang members. Those individuals were arrested.

The new rules would bring DOC policy closer into line with that of other large jail systems such as Los Angeles, Cook County (Chicago), and Philadelphia, which limit physical contact between inmates and visitors, or restrict visitors based on safety and security concerns. These policies are considered best practices in the correction field. DOC will propose the rule changes at BOC's next meeting in May and, if approved, would implement them by August.

[Philadelphia](#) and Los Angeles both limit contact visits. [New York State](#), Los Angeles, and [Cook County](#) all maintain visitor registries, and Cook County and Los Angeles may even deny visits based on certain security criteria, such as criminal history.

About the New York City Department of Correction

The New York City Department of Correction (DOC) manages the jail system for New York City. It operates Rikers Island, which houses 10 individual facilities, four borough-based jails and two hospital prison wards, as well as court pens in all five boroughs. In FY 2014, DOC had 77,141 admissions involving 56,218 individuals.

Its Average Daily Population is about 11,400, over 80 percent of whom are housed on Rikers Island. Most of the inmates in DOC custody are being detained pending the resolution of charges against them; about 15 percent are city-sentenced inmates who are serving sentences of one year or less.

“Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Ponte's 14-point plan to reform Rikers Island is a strong step towards changing the prison's culture of violence. I applaud the Mayor for addressing the severity of the issue of inmate-on-inmate violence. We have a responsibility to ensure that everyone in the City, including those incarcerated, remains safe and that our correctional system works effectively. The Mayor's plan will help make Rikers Island a more secure environment where inmates can begin to turn their lives around,” **Congressman Charlie Rangel**.

“This common-sense approach is a good step in the right direction to extinguish inmate violence and the smuggling of illegal weapons and contraband in Rikers Island. This plan also seeks to address violence perpetrated against juveniles in the correctional system, an urgent problem that must be fixed immediately. Mayor de Blasio and all involved should be commended for their leadership and commitment on this issue,” said **Congressman Hakeem Jeffries**.

“For decades, Rikers Island has maintained a toxic culture of violence. In conjunction with Correction Commissioner Joe Ponte, Mayor de Blasio is taking concrete action to change this culture of violence into one of safety, making Rikers Island safer for correction officers and inmates. In addition, by expanding educational and development services, the Mayor is transforming Rikers Island to be more rehabilitative. I applaud Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Ponte for their development of this 14-point plan and look forward to its full implementation,” said **Congressman Gregory Meeks**.

“With this comprehensive plan, the Mayor is keeping his promise to aggressively address the problem of inmate violence that has plagued Rikers Island for years and to fix New York City's broken jail system. A reformed Rikers Island will ensure a safer environment for inmates and officers alike, which will result in a stronger correctional facility better able to serve its purpose of helping criminals change their behavior. The initiatives announced today will ultimately help us put in place a prison system that promotes the rehabilitation of inmates so that they can return to society as responsible individuals that want to contribute to their communities,” said **Congressman José E. Serrano**.

“I am pleased to learn that the administration is broadening its efforts to tackle the issue of violence on Rikers Island,” said **Council Member Daniel Dromm**. “Providing inmates with educational opportunities and time to be introspective will benefit everyone. Reducing idle time by offering detainees opportunities for self-improvement activities is an important part of the anti-violence program. I am pleased to see this renewed effort to reduce inmate on inmate violence in our city jails.”

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