



Black Women's Blueprint | 279 Empire Boulevard | Brooklyn, N.Y. 11225 | 347-533-9102 (P)  
[www.blackwomensblueprint.org](http://www.blackwomensblueprint.org) | [info@blueprintny.org](mailto:info@blueprintny.org)

Members of the Board of Corrections  
1 Centre St., Rm. 2213  
New York, NY 10007

The members and staff of Black Women's Blueprint are encouraged by the hearing on the Prison Rape Elimination Act's (PREA) implementation by the New York City's Department of Corrections held April 23, 2019. While the results of the audit report does not reveal the level of progress we would hope, it is imperative that the Board continue to be transparent about the places where PREA implementation is improving, and other areas where there is still progress to be made.

Black Women's Blueprint would like to offer additional recommendations in the hope that the Board will take these strategies into consideration, and evaluate their efficacy along with the recommendations suggested by other organizations and stakeholders.

### **Healing Services, Advocacy & Prevention**

First, Black Women's Blueprint recommends that any services provided to survivors incarcerated by the New York City department of corrections should include healing services, advocacy services and prevention. Many women of color that are incarcerated in New York City are survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence and general sexual violence trauma well before entering the corrections system. Rape prevention requires understanding the vulnerability of survivors being targeted and re-traumatized - particularly in situation like prison where societal mores and expectations are challenged or suspended.

### **Robust, Trauma-Informed Care**

Second, we recommend that all personnel who work with and interact with survivors need specific training around: trauma informed care, gender and culture response, survivor centered programming and culturally specific healing methods. Incarcerated survivors have diverse gender and cultural backgrounds. Yet, simply by being bearers of sexual assault, abuse and

trauma, survivors have very similar needs and experiences navigating institutions and systems that do not respect or acknowledge their specific needs for trauma-informed or gender reactive services. Therefore, it is not enough that corrections staff attend sporadic cultural sensitivity or sexual harassment training. Rather, it is imperative for exceptional implementation of the federal law for all staff with whom survivors regularly come in contact, be sufficiently trained on trauma-informed care, gender and culture response, survivor-centered programming and culturally specific healing methods.

### **Intensify Anti-Shackling Law Oversight**

Third, Black Women's Blueprint strongly recommends strict enforcement and consistent evaluation of all prisons housing pregnant women adherence to anti-shackling laws. The lack of oversight on the anti-shackling law directly translates into violations to birthing mother's rights. This law exists as not only to stop an unnecessary and inhumane practice, but serves as a check to the prison system's historical propensity to engage with the incarcerated as lacking full humanity. We have found that other institutions working with the department of corrections have failed to consistently execute the anti-shackling law due to minimal supervision. It would stand to reason, the department of corrections would need strict oversight to ensure full adherence to anti-shackling laws within the state as well. To that end, we recommend that special care and consideration should be given to expectant and new mothers who are incarcerated by providing adequate gynecological care and allowing for bonding with their newborns. These considerations for mothers are especially crucial to not only positive outcomes regarding PREA, but to other city and state incarceration outcomes as well.

### **Survivor Representation**

Finally, Black Women's Blueprint recommends, all committees and advisory groups should include survivor representation. The best indicators of what incarcerated survivors need are the survivors themselves. The most effective institutions and organizations recognize the need for input from the communities they serve. Likewise, the department of corrections board committees and advisory groups would be well served to include currently and formerly incarcerated survivors willing to lend their experience and testimony to the implementation of PREA.

Black Women's Blueprint is a U.S. based national Black feminist organization using civil and human rights approaches to organize and develop a culture where women of African descent are fully empowered and where gender; race and other disparities are erased. For nearly a decade the work of Black Women's Blueprint has focused on prevention, training, advocacy, and healing justice in partnership with Black women and girls survivors of sexual violence across a variety of identities. Since its launch in 2010, Black Women's Blueprint has established the respect and goodwill of diverse communities across the U.S. and abroad, including that of legislators, advocacy networks, feminist and human rights movements. The organization has attracted the notice of key members of the funding community, developed a reputation for its advocacy on behalf of women of African descent, and obtained visionary leadership. We have a

proven track record of advocacy and a vested interest in the Board of Corrections fully implementing the federal law (PREA). Black Women's Blueprint will continue to represent the voices of women of color survivors of sexual violence - even and especially those within the carceral system. It is with great hope that we submit these recommendations, and look forward to more positive outcomes from board and the entire New York City carceral system.