

Testimony to the Board of Corrections
September 14, 2020
By Sarita Daftary, member, Jails Action Coalition

Today I want to thank the Board for the report you issued on the tragic death of Layleen Xtravaganza Cubilette-Polanco. It seems certain that had you not conducted that report, there would not have been any accountability for staff whose negligence and misconduct caused the loss of yet another life in the custody of the Department of Correction. I say that it seems almost certain because we get a twice-yearly reminder of the Department's failure to meet key provisions of the Nunez agreement regarding staff discipline.

I want to urge the board to also conduct a full investigation into the death of Hector Rodriguez in June, just days before you issued your report on Layleen Polanco's death. As I'm sure the Board is aware, Mr. Rodriguez died on his jail bed, while struggling to breathe during a severe asthma attack. All of the data we have about this Department suggest that there is a strong likelihood staff were not acting in accordance with the minimum standards, or with appropriate regard for the lives of people in their custody.

Additionally, I want to urge the Board to conduct full investigations into all of the deaths that occurred in DOC due to COVID-19. It is one of the most important and necessary functions this Board can fulfill to gather a full accounting of the events leading up to the death of any person in the custody of the Department of Correction - a situation in which people are wholly dependant on the officers and CHS workers for their care, without even the most basic freedoms that the rest of us can exercise to keep ourselves healthy and safe.

Every person behind those walls, and everyone who loves them, and everyone who advocates for them, is relying on this Board to exercise every type of authority available to you, and make use of every ounce of evidence available to you, knowing that the consequences can be deadly if you do not.

No more preventable deaths.

Thank you,

Sarita Daftary
Member, Jails Action Coalition