

Good morning. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak, My name is Eileen Maher. I am a woman and a community activist who was formerly incarcerated and a survivor of the Rose M. Singer Center at Rikers Island. I am a Civil Rights Union Leader with Vocal-New York, a social worker and Community Activist.

At this time I would like to acknowledge the thirty three men who were incarcerated and murdered during the Attica Uprising on this date in 1971 as well as the 85 Incarcerated Men who were injured by officers and staff during that uprising. You will never be forgotten.

I spent over 420 days on that Godforsaken excuse of an island before unnecessarily taking a plea and transferring to state prison. One of the reasons I felt compelled to do so was-as it continues to be—the dangerous, neglectful, corrupt and tortuous environment that thrives so well in the Island and its borough support jails as a whole. I would like to say things have improved since I left the Island. That New York has begun to remedy some of their wrongs within the Department of Corrections.

However, just the opposite has occurred. Despite systemic changes (albeit slow and small) in local and state laws and policies Rikers has instead turned from a torture island to a death island. Over the past nine months 13 people have been murdered while in the care and custody of the NYC Department of Correction. All but one of the individuals were not convicted of a crime, they were simply detainees. Not one of the human beings who perished had received a court mandated death warrant. New York does not have a death penalty statute—or so I thought. The most recent death that occurred—Mr. Michael Nieves.

Three, not one, not two but THREE corrections officers sat and watched as this man slit his own throat and bled out. They watched—rather than notify a medical professional—or even push the pin on their utility belt notifying the compound of an emergency. They had three pins to choose from! However rather than save the life of a fellow human being they chose to watch—and allow him to die. Like it was a spectator sport or movie.

This is exhausting. Every couple of weeks we are here-my fellow activist comrades and I, speaking about yet another preventable death of one of my sisters or brothers that occurred while on DOC watch. When will it end??

Individuals who are detained on the Island are not getting medication and medical appointments. Corrections officers and DOC staff continue to violate the Taylor Laws and absent themselves from upwards of two or more shifts in a row. As a result detainees are locked in their cells for sometimes ten to twenty hours in a row-and sometimes even more. They are not only not being provided their meals—but medications are not being provided-especially those for chronic illnesses such as diabetes, mental illnesses, sickle cell, other anemias, cancer, hypoglycemia, medically assisted substance abuse treatment and a myriad of other illnesses Human beings are not getting toilet paper, and the women are not receiving products to use during their menstruation. Toilets and sinks are breaking down beyond repair. Human beings are forced to go to the bathroom in plastic bags and drink water out of the toilet bowl. Blankets-HA! Some detainees do not even have a mattress, nevermind sheets or blankets!

When officers DO bother to come in and work their shift they are usually only there to traffic in weapons, alcohol and fentanyl infested narcotics. Oh and of course instigate and engage detainees in physical altercations and/or sexually assault and rape the detainees.

And rather than attempt to begin to fix these egregious human rights violations—and save lives and heal—the DOC and Mayor Adams are doubling down on the mistreatment and abuse and demanding that despite being illegal as per New York State Law—Solitary Confinement continue to be utilized in City Facilities. Solitary Confinement has been medically determined to be torture and permanently damaging to a person's mental health. It is almost like they WANT to torture and murder people. Maybe they do. Yes. I think that they do. That would be the logical conclusion at this point.

Clearly the DOC and New York City have proven that they are beyond incapable of operating and maintaining any kind of order and organization within their facilities. It goes without saying that they do not value human life and instead would prefer carte blanche access and tooles so they can continue to legally murder human beings entrusted to their care and custody. They need to be removed entirely from any and all operations.

The law to close Rikers Island passed Years ago at this point. What needs to happen is that closure MUST be expedited. This can begin with moving the women from the Rose M. Singer Center to their own free standing facility in Manhattan. Terminate the employment of the entire Department of Corrections and replace them with properly trained, educated and vetted healers. Couple this with the mass infusion of community services such as Improved Mental and physical health services, especially in underserved neighborhoods. Housing, supportive housing, improved educational services and programs, a mass infusion of domestic violence services and programs, alternatives to incarceration and of course Violence Interrupters and rather than sending ill equipped and barely trained police officers on Mental Health calls send trained and properly vetted mental health professionals to intervene and begin the healing process.

We cannot have one more person die. Please stop the utter disregard for human life within and around the NYC DOC. All of our lives are depending on it. Thank you again for allowing me to speak.

Eileen M. Maher