

Leah Faria
Community Organizer
Women's Community Justice Association
Board of Correction Testimony
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My name is Leah Faria and I am a Community Organizer with the Women's Community Justice Association. We lead the #BEYONDrosies campaign advocating for women and gender-expansive people at the Rose M. Singer Center on Rikers Island. The first pillar of our campaign is decarcerating these mothers, daughters and sisters who are particularly vulnerable in jail.

I was detained at Rosie's for nearly three years starting in 1997. At the time, I was only 23 years old, a single mom, who was suffering from the trauma of an abusive relationship. Now I visit regularly in my role with WCJA, and the stories of the women are still all too much like mine. The women and gender-expansive people at Rosie's are from Black and brown communities with the fewest resources, many are domestic violence victims, and most are mothers and caregivers.

In June, WCJA released a report with the Lippman Commission called *Path to Under 100* that showed who is at Rosie's. Some of the findings were that:

- Harlem, East NY/Brownsville in Brooklyn and South Bronx had the highest admissions to Rosie's over the past five years.
- 82% of women had mental health diagnosis, compared to 49% of men at Rikers.
- Up to 93% had experienced physical, sexual, and/or emotional violence.
- 70% were parents, compared to 54% of men, and most had children under the age of 18.
- Most are at Rosie's for short amounts of time—the median length of stay was only 13 days.
- One-third were there because they couldn't afford \$5,000 or less of bail.
- 22% were at Rosie's on non-violent charges, mostly related to drugs and property crime.

Women and gender-expansive people are particularly vulnerable in jail. The death of Mary Yehudah this May was a tragedy that never should have happened. There must be a focus on decarceration and safely releasing as many as possible with community-based support.

Right now, there are 350 women and gender-expansive people at Rosie's. The city's plan to close Rikers aims for 100, and the *Path to Under 100* report is a plan to get the population even lower. New York City can get there. At the height of COVID, the city decreased the number at Rosie's to 149. At that time, the Board of Correction issued a call for decarceration, and there is still a major health crisis.

The *Path to Under 100* report is a roadmap that outlines how to reduce the number of those detained at Rosie's by at least 70%. The strategies include:

1. **Investing in gender-responsive community resources and diversion programs** that meet the specific needs of women and gender-expansive people. SHERO is an example of a transitional housing program that has diverted over 300 from Rosie's in the past five years, with only two rerarrests at the fraction of the cost of keeping someone in jail.
2. **Conduct a holistic needs assessment early on** that identify domestic violence, housing, mental health, caregiver status and other factors that should be used in decisions throughout the case and to connect those at Rosie's with resources.
3. **Establish a Population Review Team** that brings together stakeholders to review every individual case at Rosie's and facilitate non-jail alternatives.
4. **Provide accessible, current information on the demographics and resources available for those Rosie's** including a citywide Women's Resource Navigator.

The Board of Corrections can make a difference in decarceration, and the women and gender-expansive people at Rosie's should be a major priority.

Thank you.