

Testimony submitted to the Board of Correction

Submitted by Sarita Daftary, Co-Director, Freedom Agenda

Tuesday September 13, 2022

To Members and Staff of the Board of Correction,

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Freedom Agenda, a project that organizes with people who have been incarcerated on Rikers, their loved ones, and people whose family members are currently incarcerated.

I want to thank the Board for the recent report you issued on 10 of the 16 deaths in custody last year. The results, while perhaps not surprising given the state of the City's jails, are nonetheless chilling. The report shows clearly that these deaths were preventable, were anything but natural, and occurred because of deep operational failures at multiple levels. While the details varied, the common thread is a deep disregard for human life by the people and agency into whose care tens of thousands of vulnerable New Yorkers are placed every year. Among our members whose loved ones are suffering on Rikers right now, that disregard for human life is apparent on a daily basis. In most cases, their loved ones are too scared to report the abuses they are subjected to.

The Board carefully documented failures at multiple levels – including failure to complete rounds, falsified logbook entries, missed medical appointments, failure to provide first aid, deficiencies in providing for suicide watch, and more. And the Board issued recommendations that are important, and yet, are recommendations you have issued before and which you have no reason to believe will be implemented immediately. Yet the changes you recommended are necessary to provide minimum standards and basic services for people in DOC custody.

Given those combined truths, the Board must issue a call for decarceration. The Board has done this before, and the leadership you took to do so in March 2020 had a clear impact and likely saved many lives. Right now, the threat to health and safety posed by DOC's dysfunction is at least as great, or greater, than the threat Covid-19 posed in spring 2020. Meanwhile, the jail population has been rising – with City sentences up to more than 400 people (from a low of 75 in 2020) and over 5,000 people awaiting trial. This Board knows that the people in the jails are not safe, nor will they be in the near future. We ask you to fulfill your mandate by urgently issuing a call for decarceration.

Sincerely,

Sarita Daftary

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