



February 22, 2023

BY EMAIL

Members of the Board
NYC Board of Correction
2 Lafayette Street, Suite 1221
New York, NY 10007

Re: The Board of Correction's Proposal to Decrease the Number of Meetings and to Restrict the Number of Public Comments

Dear Members of the Board,

We strongly oppose both (1) the Public Meeting Frequency Resolution that would decrease by a third the number of meetings the Board holds each year and (2) the Board's new policy of limiting public comments to only elected officials and the first six people to sign up for each comment period. Both of these measures undermine the Board's oversight authority and its accountability to the public.

We urge the Board to reject these changes, to continue meeting as currently scheduled, and to allow all members of the public who register to speak at meetings.

Board of Correction meetings are one of the only avenues available for incarcerated persons, their loved ones, and advocates to share their concerns and hold the Department of Correction accountable. This accountability is needed now more than ever. [Nineteen individuals died under DOC care last year](#), 16 people the year before, countless others before that, and yet another so far this year. And the [Nunez Federal Monitor](#) routinely reports that the jails are utterly dysfunctional and dangerous. If the Board is serious about providing "[safer, fairer, and more humane jails](#)," as its mission demands, it needs to hear from directly impacted individuals. Given the humanitarian crisis facing New York City jails, the Board should be meeting even more frequently—not less.

Written comments are not an adequate substitute for oral testimony. During a [typical Board of Correction meeting](#), votes on proposed measures are taken in the very same meeting at which the measure is presented. This renders written testimony less effective. The best way for the public to voice their concerns, then, is by testifying orally *before* a vote is taken—the Board should allow all registered individuals to do so.

Moreover, both of these proposed changes are indicative of a troubling larger trend. The Board of Correction seems to be moving away from a model of transparency and toward secrecy. This runs counter to the Board’s purpose as an independent oversight body. For example, for the [past five years](#) until this past week, the Board did not attempt to limit the number of comments during *any* of its meetings.

The proposal to limit public comments was announced just one day before a meeting in which the Board was supposed to vote on variances that would eliminate the delivery of mail and packages to incarcerated persons. Hearing the voices of directly impacted people, who would be losing a tangible contact with their friends and families, is critical for the Board to understand why it should deny this variance request. Limiting commentary to just six individuals would make it impossible for the Board to make an informed decision.

Reducing both the number of meetings and comments harms both the public and the Board. It limits the public’s trust in the Board as an oversight entity and eliminates a crucial knowledge base for the Board. Most importantly, as the former executive director of the BOC has [stated](#), “the leverage of an ‘impending public meeting agenda’ is an effective way to push for change in between the meetings. It saves lives.”

We urge the Board to withdraw the Public Meeting Frequency Resolution and to grant all who wish to speak during each meeting the opportunity to do so.

Sincerely,

Members of the Jails Action Coalition