



THE COUNCIL *of* THE CITY OF NEW YORK OFFICE OF COUNCIL MEMBER CARLINA L. RIVERA

March 14, 2023

Re: Department of Correction's Variance Requests: 1-11(e)(1)(i) (Correspondence/Mail) & 1-12(a) (Packages)

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the Department of Correction's (DOC) request for continuing variances to change the mail system for people in custody. Under the proposed variances, all mail would be sent to an off-site facility to be scanned and read on tablets by people in custody, and packages would have to be sent directly from a limited list of vendors. As Chair of the Committee on Criminal Justice, I strongly oppose these changes that would further strip people in DOC custody of their rights and humanity without addressing existing issues within the City's jails, and place an undue burden on family members and loved ones.

A City Correction Department investigator testified in federal court on [November 29, 2021](#) that drugs and other contraband found on Rikers Island "usually" come in through corrupt officers and staff. This evidence, coupled with a Department of Investigations statement in [July 2022](#) that mail and visits are not significant entry points for contraband, suggests that the Board should reject DOC's proposals. Instead, the DOC should focus on implementing better security measures to hold their own staff accountable, and ensure provision of medical care and treatment programs to help people in their custody manage chemical addictions.

Given DOC's current operations I remain concerned about the ways in which this proposal would limit or prevent incarcerated people from receiving correspondence, to which they have a right. I urge the Board to deny these variance requests, now and in the future.