

**TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY: REV QUE ENGLISH,  
NYC CLERGY ROUNDTABLE  
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I choose to believe that we all want the same thing here and that is ultimately our youth and young adults don't ever end up at Rikers nor make prison their permanent address. While this is what we're moving toward, it is important that until we get here that fairness, care, and safety for all mentally as well as physically is realized by all who have to enter into the doorways of Rikers. I have faith in DOC and BOC that they will not pursue or approve rule changes in their current public form, and will work to ensure that visitors are not turned away, that denials are not arbitrary or discriminatory, that the appeals process cannot be allowed to take up to 8 weeks.

Safety and Protection for all is key. It is however alarming to hear that in a 5 week period we had 7 correctional employees arrested that contributed to violence and disorder according to a NY1 report. So we can all agree that it's important to not only take care of what's happening outside the house but what's happening inside the house.

Change to mistreatment - including violent mistreatment - of visitors as was known of a visitor who was beaten by an officer in the central visit house.

It is important again to take care of what's happening inside the house which I'm sure no one disagrees with.

I must say to be able to contribute to the conversation - here representing NYC Clergy Roundtable as well as the NYC Criminal Justice Task Force where Dr. Divine Pryor is the Chair - is a great start where the doors are open for candid discussion and hopefully, ultimately implementation of proposed changes. I do want to commend you for employing some of the recommendations of tightening security around the visiting process. I believe our concentration at this point should focus on security improvements within the existing minimum standards which will assist with the reduction of contraband. Lets look at all the sources of contraband.

The DOC claims that the limitations are needed to reduce contraband brought into the jails but the facts do not support this. Every official and unofficial report confirms that the primary source of contraband is staff, not visitors – and it is important to note that the increase in contrabands are related to drugs, not weapons. Moreover, the vast majority of violent incidents at Rikers do not involve smuggled contraband. The fact is that there is a lack of a connection between visit restrictions, violence reduction and reduction in weapons contraband in the jails. Current procedures are already effective in stopping contraband entering the jails through visitors. If there is a basis for concern, limitations on visits can currently be imposed including suspending visits and requiring visits to be non-contact booth visits.

There is no evidence that the proposed limitations would reduce violence. However, what we do know is that visiting is one of the best methods for preventing violence and recidivism.

Visitors provide support and important community connections and facilitate successful reentry. Suicides in jail often occur during the first days of lock up when people detained need visitors to make bail or provide critical mental health and other supports. When visits go up, violence goes down. The City has committed significant resources and funding toward decreasing unnecessary detention and increasing successful reentry following incarceration.

Let us, therefore, allow the detained individual the opportunity to refuse a visit from the individuals visiting them. We understand there are circumstances where this is not possible as a result of impending danger from visitors who may have very violent offences or warrants - this is understandable; therefore, provision should be made for all individuals who are receiving visits to be made aware of who that visitor is prior to them entering into the visiting room.

Instead of severely restricting visits, there are effective ways to achieve the Mayor's important goal of reducing violence, including better searches, enhanced TSA body scanning technology, and increased use of cameras.

We urge the Board of Correction (BOC) to require that the Department of Correction (DOC) submit to the Board a report analyzing the effectiveness of the new DOC screening measures (e.g. new DOC training). The BOC should delay changing the minimum standards until they receive and review the report. However, if the BOC decides to proceed to adopt some of the DOC's proposed changes, then we urge that the process be clear and transparent. We welcome the Department of Correction's stated openness to revising the proposal based on the concerns and input of faith and community members. The following provisions are what we support:

- No visitor will be turned away on a first visit
- The lack of a family relationship or otherwise close or intimate relationship between the inmate and the prospective visitor should not be a considered factor
- Denying visits must only be a last resort and the DOC should use other options currently at its disposal when a risk has been identified (e.g. close monitoring of the visit, non-contact visiting)
- The appeals process should not be changed

These are our recommendations. These are our concerns.

Realizing that the decisions you make on these issues will have far reaching effects on our city - families - particularly black and brown - that can either lend to their healing or contribute to their brokenness. They should not be caught in a web of politics but instead in a web of safety. We trust you will do the right thing for all.