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## **STATEMENT ON RECENT SUICIDES IN THE NEW YORK CITY JAILS**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** September 1, 2021

Since November 2020, at least five persons have committed suicide while detained on Rikers Island; there were no reported suicides at Rikers in 2018, 2019 and most of 2020. The Board of Correction sends our heartfelt condolences to their families and friends.

Five suicides in nine months along with an alarming increase in attempted self-harm signals a crisis for persons in custody and for the New York City Department of Correction. The already difficult conditions in the New York City jails have only been made worse by the extreme challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. As of the end of July 2021, 35% of correction officers were out on sick leave or restricted from working with persons in custody, creating unsafe conditions for both staff and detained persons. Furthermore, the population of detained persons has again surged.

The Board of Correction calls on the City of New York to move with urgency to create a safer environment for persons in custody and staff. Given that several incidents have occurred in intake, the Department must ensure an orderly intake process that quickly provides appropriate housing and medical care for persons in custody, and better identifies and monitors persons in custody who may commit self-harm or harm to others. Until then, we believe the situation will only worsen and result in unacceptably unsafe conditions for persons in custody, for correction officers and for other Departmental staff.

Furthermore, the Board calls on all criminal justice stakeholders, the judges, district attorneys, defender organizations, the New York State Department of Correction and Community Supervision, and the Department to take immediate steps to reduce the jail population. The Board will work with criminal justice stakeholders to expeditiously decarcerate. As long as the population steadily rises and the staffing crisis continues, persons in custody and those who protect and work with them are in an impossible position and these troubling conditions will persist. It is time for all stakeholders to come together to address this crisis.

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