

Good afternoon, Board of Correction, thank you for this opportunity to provide public comment today. My name is Ryan Acquattro, and I work with Freedom Agenda, a member-led project at the Urban Justice Center. Our members are New Yorkers who have been detained on Rikers, or who have loved ones who are or have been detained there. Some of our members have lost loved ones to Rikers Island.

Today I'm here to talk about the open air rec units in the Borough Based Jails that we heard a presentation about today. Our members have been attending the design workshops for the borough based jails in each borough where they're being designed, and at the most recent workshop in Queens expressed concerns about changes that had been made to the design of the open air rec units.

The jail designs in Queens were changed between October 2025 and April 2026. In October, the designs for these recreation areas showed the outer mesh stopping at 7 feet. Now it extends to the ceiling. The reasons DOC has given for doing this do not make sense.

DOC said that they are trying to achieve uniformity among all four sites, and that an outer layer of mesh above 7 feet is required in Manhattan and Brooklyn because of privacy concerns for people in custody and people outside, with residential buildings nearby. However, there are already differences in the designs between sites, based on their different contexts. The Bronx site, for example, is not adjacent to a courthouse. The Brooklyn facility's connection to the court is underground rather than above-ground like the other facilities. The exterior designs of each of the facilities all differ significantly. Notably, the Bellevue outposted therapeutic housing unit does not use this second layer of floor to ceiling mesh on rec units. DOC said this is because Bellevue does not immediately face another residential building. Why shouldn't the same reasoning be applied to the Bronx and Queens?

DOC also said that the Public Design Commission was another factor to consider. Realistically, most people on the outside will rarely look up at

these buildings, and we remain concerned that a fairly minor aesthetic difference from the outside could be used as a justification to reduce access to light and air for people inside.

DOC did confirm that the inner layer of mesh meets the State Commission On Correction's security requirements, and that the outer layer of mesh is included at the City's discretion. Given that fact, we ask that the Board push DOC to reconsider this design, to create more air and light in the open air recreation units in ways that are very clearly possible in the Bronx and Queens, and consider all possible methods to expand access to air and light in recreation areas in Manhattan and Brooklyn. The Board must ensure that the borough-based jails maximize air and light for incarcerated people in every way possible, including in the design of these open-air recreation spaces. These areas are the only access to fresh air people in custody will have, and if that outer layer of mesh wasn't necessary above seven feet before, it's not necessary now.