

**Testimony on Behalf of the Community Members of the Rikers Visiting Workgroup
NYC Board of Correction Meeting
June 9, 2026**

Submitted by Jeanette Bocanegra, Executive Director, Justice for Families and
Tanya Krupat, Vice President, Policy & Advocacy, Osborne Association

Good afternoon. We submit this written testimony as members of the newly formed Rikers Visiting Workgroup. By way of background, as a result of advocacy by the Jails Action Coalition in 2014, the first Rikers Visit Workgroup met for more than 6 years and ended during Covid, as a result of a changing administration's priorities.

To increase the Workgroup's effectiveness, the two of us, and Michael Klinger (Senior Jail Services Attorney at Brooklyn Defender Services) have volunteered to co-coordinate the community members of the Working Group. Michael is out of office and has not reviewed this testimony, but several Workgroup members have contributed to it.

We would like to provide the Board with an update and also urge you to include visiting as a standing item on BOC's monthly meeting agendas.

Our testimony includes some recent experiences visitors have shared with Workgroup members, and we plan to solicit ongoing input from visitors and for their experiences and recommendations to inform and guide our work. They remind us that we have work to do and that visiting is a lifeline and critically important. It's one hour together that helps people survive the devastating, traumatic experience of being detained on Rikers, and that visitors set aside a whole day for, as well as huge amounts of emotional energy and resiliency to get through.

As you know, the Department announced last December that they would hire the first ever Executive Director for Visit Operations, and ED Brown has been in place for 4 months now. We commend the Department for the decision to create this position and to have filled it quickly: having a dedicated person to oversee the myriad aspects of visit operations and focus on improving visiting is critical and unfortunately, is rare to find in a correctional setting.

We want to acknowledge Ms. Brown for the integrity, openness, and respect she has demonstrated. However, she cannot do this work alone. If we are serious about improving the visiting experience, we must ensure she has the necessary resources, staffing, and support. If hiring restrictions exist, we should explore reallocating resources to prioritize visiting and family engagement.

At the December 2025 City Council meeting where the creation of the Executive Director for Visit Operations position was announced, DOC also announced that she would have 12 staff. To date, she has none and we have been told that DOC has a hiring freeze so there is no timeframe for hiring any staff to work with her. We urge you to look into this.

With a cost of over \$500,000 per person on Rikers for one year (with often devastating and even deadly outcomes), and a total DOC proposed budget for FY27 of \$1.26 BILLION, it is difficult for visitors to understand why basic family-centered supports remain under-resourced, and money pours into a system slated for closure. We urge investments that improve the visiting experience, support the maintenance and building of connections for people inside, and build the foundation for the more humane borough-based system we have been promised.

The Visit Workgroup convened for the first time on May 1st. The Workgroup consists of those directly affected, advocates, attorneys, and providers. On the DOC side, the first meeting was well attended including Deputy Commissioners as well as Central Visit staff. We also took a tour of Central Visits after our meeting at Bulova and were shown some visible improvements including signage, a covering and benches for visitors lined up outside of Central Visits, new lockers, and the children's area made possible through the Children's Museum of Manhattan. This was all great to see.

Our next meeting is scheduled for July 17th, just after the July BOC meeting, but the work to improve visits is ongoing and happens outside of our meetings as well, so we ask that you include visiting on the agenda of your next *and every* meeting.

As members of the newly formed Visit Workgroup, the priority issues we hope to work on first include:

- communication with visitors (about lockdowns, transfers, court trips)
- non contact visits (data, quality, minimizing use of these)
- heat in visiting rooms and processing areas
availability of overgarments
- visitor wait times
- unpacking the visiting reports including the new child visitor report and the reasons visits do not happen (for example, there is an "other" category that is the reason for significant numbers of visits to not happen. What does this mean / include?)

There is much work to improve visiting that involves various Departments within DOC, such as legal, transportation, data and research, and training. For example, compliance with the three City Council laws that were passed in March 2025, and the reporting they require is outside of the scope of the Executive Director of Visit Operations' role, as is training for all visiting staff. We urge attention to visiting from all these areas working in coordination and collaboration with ED Brown.

A note about the three laws:

We were happy to see that DOC has just issued their first [report](#) on child visitors, which includes that more than 10,700 children visited Rikers in 2025. We will be digging into the data here as it provides visiting data for children per facility including the wait times. RNDC had 2,132 child visitors and the average wait time for child visitors at RNDC was 2 hours and 40 minutes (164 minutes). The average wait time for child visitors to RESH Annex was over 4 hours. Clearly,

there is work to be done to reduce these wait times which are too long for any visitor, but especially worrisome and problematic for children.

Every child visiting a loved one deserves an experience that is humane and welcoming. As we move toward the borough-based jail system, let us build a visiting model that reflects these values from the beginning.

Local Law 40 also requires DOC to conduct a feasibility study to expand tele-visits (video visiting) beyond the hours currently offered on Fridays from 8:30am to 1pm, which are not accessible for many because these hours conflict with school and work schedules. The law states. This study was due on January 1, 2026. We urge DOC to expand tele-visits to include weekend and evening hours so that children and families do not have to miss school and work to video visit.

We must continue examining policies that create barriers. Limiting certain services or communication to weekday hours when children are in school and many people are at work does not reflect the realities families face. We must design systems around the needs of children and caregivers, not administrative convenience.

Local Law 44, amends the administrative code to modify quarterly reporting requirements on visits of incarcerated individuals and requires the department of correction to record notifications to incarcerated individuals of visiting requests; goes into effect 270 days after being passed or January 2026.

Recording notifications is important as the Department reports that 316 visitors refused their visits in the last quarter reported on (October through December 2025); 99 in person visits and 217 for televisits.

Local Law 43, amends administrative code to require DOC to establish and operate an online scheduling system for visits to incarcerated person, goes into effect 2 years after being passed, or April 2027.

There is much work to be done and we stand ready to partner with and support ED Brown in her new role, work with the Department at all levels, and with the Board of Correction to accomplish meaningful improvements in visiting. Let us borrow an important lesson from the pandemic times: COVID-19 demonstrated that institutions can adapt and implement new approaches when there is a commitment to do so. We should carry those lessons forward. Strong family connections improve outcomes, support rehabilitation, improve Corrections Officers' work experience, and maintain hope inside and out. This can only be achieved by a consistent light being shined on visiting, and we ask you to start by adding this to your standing agenda items.

Thank you.

A few Recent Visitor Experiences:

- On a recent Saturday, buses arriving at Rikers were met with a motorcade of cars, a large group of officers, and a canine unit. Visitors were searched before they reached their lockers and personal items were confiscated. One visiting family said, "How can they blame visitor wait times on staff shortages when they have 30 CO's at the bus stop?"
- A woman who visits her son weekly shared she has five mental health diagnoses, including anxiety and paranoid personality disorder. When the visiting process is chaotic, she can become flustered and upset. An Officer told her to sit and calm down when she arrived at the registration booth with her ID. She worries about her son who has undiagnosed mental health issues.
- The guidelines for what visiting family members can bring to people in custody change often, and "rules" can seem arbitrary.
- A young mom visiting with her two children was told her children's father (who she was visiting) was out (to court or medical) but as she was leaving Rikers, after hours, he called her asking where she was. She turned around and went back to start the process all over. The whole one hour visit took her 10 hours.