

I grew up in East Harlem. I have been incarcerated since September of 2024. I am currently in RNDC (Robert N. Davoren Center) on Rikers Island. I have been held in RESH (Enhanced Supervision Housing) twice in the last year.

In RESH, there are different levels of lockdown. You're on Level 1 at first. There are more restrictions for people on Level 1 than on Level 2. People usually stay on a Level for thirty days. The jail puts incompatible people, like people from different gangs, together on Level 3; it's an experiment, and the experiment is not working out – people are getting cut in the face.

The first time I was in RESH, I was there for 60 days. After being on Level 1 for about a week, I had a hearing. I was accused of being involved in an assault. I tried to bring in the victim so that he could tell the officers I wasn't involved, but they didn't let me bring anyone in. The hearing officer said I was guilty.

When hearings happen, you're your own lawyer. Nobody gets representation. If you're involved in an incident, you're getting sent to the box. People rarely beat accusations.

One time, an officer accused me of being involved in an incident but he didn't show me any videos or stills. I pled not guilty. They told me I was banned from contact visits indefinitely which typically only happens when there's an incident during visitation. There's supposed to be paperwork when they're restricting visits, but the officer told me directly there was no paperwork about my restriction. After a week, I was found guilty and dropped back to Level 1 for a month.

On Level 1, I spent most of my time in my cell alone - it felt like a cage. I was outside my cell for an hour each day for recreation. Sometimes the COs said we couldn't go out for recreation because of the weather. I was shackled to a chair for 4 hours a day. The COs would unchain us for a shower, and after the shower they wouldn't let us come out again. I spent 19 or 20 hours in my cell every single day. The COs strip search me every time I leave my cell - doesn't matter if it's for a shower or recreation. It makes me not want to leave. There've been a lot of times where I've spent 2, 3, 4 days in the cell so that I don't have to get strip searched.

When I was on Level 1, my cell was on the second floor, the top tier. The COs don't like coming up to the top tier so it's hard to get their attention. I had to bang on my cell door for 45 minutes to an hour *every day* to get their attention so that I could use the bathroom, get a tissue, or ask for a pen. The officers are supposed to come around every 30 minutes. There are enough officers around, but they ignore you. Someone could kill themselves and they wouldn't know.

In RESH, we got visiting days once a week. I could hug my wife and son at the beginning and end of the visits, but I wasn't allowed any other contact. During the visit, my leg was shackled to a chair. One time, after my son's mother visited, she got banned for 180 days, and I didn't see my son the whole time.

In RESH, you're away from everything. You feel out of sight and out of mind. It plays tricks on your mental health being in RESH. It made me feel like nobody could hear me. It took away any sense of control that I thought I had over my life. It made me feel hopeless and helpless.

The way that we're treated in RESH makes us feel like animals. Our meals were dropped into our cells through a slot. Nobody actually checked in to see how we were doing.

The doctor would come by every morning for “sick visits” around 5 or 6 am, so you would miss it if you weren’t awake. One time, I put in for a sick visit for athlete’s foot. When the doctor came by, he didn’t even look at my feet. He just prescribed me a cream. On top of that, every day, I was telling the staff that I *needed* to go to the dentist since I got here because my filling fell out. I’d been asking to see the dentist, and I’d been repeatedly told that I’d be put on a list. It took more than 5 weeks before I got an appointment.

There are also not enough mental health caseworkers. Most people only see them once during their entire time inside. I want to tell them about what it feels like to be cut off from the world. When I was in RESH a second time, I asked for an appointment but I never saw a counselor. I wanted emotional support but I don’t think they’re able to offer that anyway. I got to speak to someone in RNDC after a few weeks, but then at my next appointment it was a different counselor; they told me it might keep being a different person every time. I think when you’re dealing with sensitive and confidential subjects you should be seeing the same person every time you go to counseling so that you can build understanding.

There was nothing to do all day in RESH. The only thing you could do was read books and write letters – I read anything I could get my hands on to pass the time. Sometimes I couldn’t even write letters because I didn’t have a pen. The law library was the most consistent thing. But on Level 1, you didn’t get to leave your cell when the law library came around – they’d just come to your door and ask if there was anything you wanted to know or research.

There’s no programming in RESH. You might be let out of your cell and sit shackled to a chair for 10-15 minutes to talk to someone but there’s no curriculum. Sometimes we talked about the game that was on recently. After a few minutes, they’d make you sign a book, and then they’d leave and you’d go back to your cell.

I was on Level 2 recently, and there I could sometimes go out without being shackled to a desk. I was allowed in the recreation cage with other guys instead of doing rec alone. But even on Level 2, I didn’t feel like coming out of my cell because I was being treated inhumanely. My cell didn’t have heating and they weren’t fixing it. They even came around with a thermometer to check how cold people’s cells were. I spent half the day under the blankets because it was too cold not to - I didn’t want to come out because it felt like being outdoors.

Once, they ran out of the allergen-friendly food I could have. I mentioned this and one of the Deputy Wardens got aggressive - she grabbed my hand, which was sticking out of the slot in my door, bent my wrist and pushed my hand back in. I heard her say “he thinks somebody cares.”

I’ve been going through all the avenues I can to advocate for myself this whole time - I know I should’ve had contact visits, the heat should’ve been on, and I should’ve been getting real food, not Raisin Bran, for meals. I’ve filed grievances and 311 complaints, but it’s like they can just ignore you. I think one positive change could be more frequent psych evaluations for the jail staff - at least once every two years or ideally once a year.

In RESH, we were only allowed to have free calls for six minutes a day. I had to choose between calling my family and calling my lawyer, so I called my family. I have a wife and a

5-year-old son. Talking to them is usually the only time I feel like I'm being heard. When I was in RESH last time I was locked up, we got to use the phones for 21 minutes every three hours so it was a big change. One time I talked to the warden about phone time, and he told me that phone calls are so short to make sure that people don't want to come back.

I used to want to be moved to gen pop because I knew there was workout programming and social workers who would listen to music with you. But since I got moved out of RESH, I've realized things are just as bad in gen pop. It's still cold and the COs are cruel to people here too.