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THE COUNCIL
OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
DANIEL DROMM
COUNCIL MEMBER, 25TH DISTRICT, QUEENS

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April 17, 2020

Margaret Egan, Executive Director
Chair and Members
New York City Board of Correction
1 Centre Street, Room 2213
New York, NY 10007

Re: Correctional Health Services (CHS) Variance Requests

Dear Ms. Egan, Chair Jones Austin, and Members:

I am writing to express my dismay at the process by which the above mentioned variance requests were handled. While this crisis does require quick action to contain COVID-19 virus, it also requires decisions to not be so quick that they create other significant problems.

Both the Council and the Board rely on the input of experts, including legal and medical professionals, and impacted communities. In recent years, the Board has made tremendous strides to ensuring these voices are considered *before* issues are deliberated and votes are taken. I ask that the Board continue this fair and transparent practice, even in, especially in, such extraordinary times. I look forward to engaging with the relevant groups between now and the next Board meeting to gain a better understanding of how CHS's requests impact the most vulnerable individuals in our jails.

Overall, what is clear is that the mental health needs of those currently in custody appear to be more intense than ever. Although COVID-19 does require adaptation, it should not ultimately mean a rollback of services. I am heartened to hear that the Board is requiring CHS to develop a system to enable remote access for victim advocates for those reporting sexual abuse.

The Department must follow the Board's call for a drastic reduction in the jail population. Otherwise, any variance request concerning the facilities' safety is rendered ineffective. In fact, I ask that the Board tie any grant of a variance request to the Department of Correction's efforts to ensure the safe release of as many individuals as possible. Finally, I ask that the Board require the Department to report on efforts to guarantee *everyone*, including those in custody, have access to the tools they need to avoid infection (*e.g.*, soap, hand sanitizer, and masks).

Thank you for your careful consideration of my comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel Dromm".

Daniel Dromm
Chair, Committee on Finance
New York City Council Member, 25th District