



**BOARD OF CORRECTION  
CITY OF NEW YORK**

July 14, 2025

**Notice of Changes to the Board**

The Board of Correction (“BOC” or “Board”) recognizes and sends its deepest gratitude to former Board Member Dr. Robert – “Bobby” – Cohen for his 16 years of service as a Board Member. Dr. Cohen was appointed to the Board in April 2009 by the New York City Council and concluded his tenure on July 8, 2025.

In addition to his service on the Board, Dr. Cohen worked in and around Rikers Island for over 40 years in various capacities, driven by his passion for criminal justice and jail reform. Dr. Cohen served as Director of the Montefiore Rikers Island Health Service, Vice President for Medical Operations of the NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation, and Director of the AIDS Center at St. Vincent's Hospital. He also represented the American Public Health Association on the National Commission for Correctional Health Care for 17 years. Due to his extensive firsthand experiences in correctional healthcare, Dr. Cohen also served as a federal court appointed monitor overseeing medical care for prisoners in Florida, Ohio, New York State, Michigan, and Connecticut.

During his 16 years on the Board, Dr. Cohen was pivotal in countless projects to create safer and more humane conditions in City jails. He served as a leading voice against solitary confinement, having helped end solitary confinement for juveniles and expand punitive segregation limitations. Dr. Cohen was deeply involved in the creation of Chapter 6 of the Board’s Minimum Standards that created a Risk Management Accountability System (RMAS) and restrictive housing rules pursuant to Local Law 42 of 2024, to replace punitive segregation in its entirety.

Dr. Cohen was also crucial in rulemaking to protect people in custody’s access to physical contact during visits with loved ones and to discuss people in custody with a person-forward vocabulary. He was central in incorporating national PREA standards into the Board’s Minimum Standards. Additionally, Dr. Cohen utilized his correctional healthcare background in many different facets. He helped reform reporting requirements and responses to in-custody injuries, assisted in clinical reviews of deaths in custody, and provided helpful guidance regarding clinical observation of individuals with serious mental illnesses.

Dr. Cohen has been a leading expert on correctional healthcare and an unwavering advocate for equity and safety inside the City’s correctional facilities for staff, people in custody, and their loved ones. Dr. Cohen’s spirited commitment to the work will be deeply missed.

Current and former colleagues shared personal statements on Dr. Cohen's impact on criminal justice and the humanization of the City's jail system:

"I am truly thankful to have worked with Dr. Robert Cohen ("Bobby") for the past few years," said **Jasmine Georges-Yilla**, Executive Director of the Board. "Throughout his 16 years on the Board, he has been a bold leader, committed to fairness, transparency, and accountability in our City's jails. But just as importantly, he has been a true supporter of the Board's staff—always recognizing the work behind the scenes, offering encouragement, and frequently accompanying staff in the jails. Bobby brought compassion, urgency, and integrity to every conversation, and we're all better for it. I'm grateful not just for his leadership, but for the kindness and respect he consistently showed to me and our team. He will be missed."

"Dr Bobby - Thanks so much for welcoming me into the fold with aplomb!" said Board Vice Chair **Helen Skipper**. "Your wealth of knowledge in the historical background of the BOC was always on point and all your interactions were very meaningful! You will be missed – I wish you blessings on your continued journey!"

"Dr. Cohen's unwavering commitment to the well-being of people in custody has left a lasting impression on many, including me, after years of visiting Rikers together," said Board Member **Felipe Franco**. "Besides his public advocacy, he was committed to his oversight duties which he performed with:

- Empathy – oversight is not just about gathering the facts; it's about acknowledging the person behind the request.
- Safety – the BOC standards, here to protect lives and improve conditions for everyone in NYC jails.
- Systemic Solution – violation of the standards is the tip of the iceberg of structural challenges in our jails that cannot be solved one problem at a time.

Dr. Cohen's example serves as a powerful reminder that meaningful oversight saves lives and demands a commitment to dignity, empathy, and unwavering attention to the humanity of those in custody. His legacy is not just in the policies he shaped, but in the lives he touched through his unseen acts of care and advocacy. Gracias, Bobby."

"Dear Bobby," said Board Member **Lauren Stossel**, "it's been such a pleasure to see you in action in over the past decade. I remember attending Board meetings as a psychiatric trainee and being inspired by your passion and dedication to the rights of incarcerated people. Those meetings were part of what inspired my path towards forensic psychiatry and my work at Rikers, and I will always be thankful for that. It's been a great privilege to sit alongside you these past few months and, while I feel deeply saddened that our shared tenure is so brief, I am so grateful for all you've done and wish you the best!"

"I thank Dr. Cohen for his nearly two decades of service as a member of the Board of Correction," said Council Speaker **Adrienne Adams**. "Throughout his time on the Board, Dr. Cohen has consistently demonstrated what it looks like to serve with fairness, humanity, and courage. I wish him a restful and happy retirement."

“It has been an honor to work with and learn from Dr. Robert Cohen. His tireless advocacy for the most vulnerable in our criminal legal system has set a higher standard for what we should expect from our leaders and city agencies. His work has been instrumental not just in exposing violence, poor conditions, and unacceptable treatment – but in changing these conditions, leading to necessary, urgent, and groundbreaking reforms to reduce the jail population, close Riker’s Island, and ban solitary confinement. His compassion and moral clarity guided me personally when I was the Chair of the Committee on Criminal Justice, and I am grateful for his advice and true commitment to a safer and more just city” said Council Member **Carlina Rivera** (D-02).

“From his time working in the clinics on Rikers Island to his time serving on the NYC Board of Correction, Dr. Cohen has long been a fierce champion for people in custody,” said **Patsy Yang**, Senior Vice President for Correctional Health Services. “Since late 2015, when New York City began transitioning its correctional health service from a private contractor to NYC Health + Hospitals, Dr. Cohen and I have worked under the shared belief that providing high-quality health care to the people in custody who need it, is the top priority of the healthcare service. Correctional Health Services, and each and all of our patients, salute and thank Dr. Cohen for his unwavering advocacy for this mission.”

“We wish him all the best in his future endeavors,” said DOC Commissioner **Lynelle Maginley-Liddie**.

“Bobby's tenure and leadership on the Board were marked by unmatched perseverance toward reducing harm and improving conditions for people detained and working inside the city's jails,” said former Board Executive Director **Martha King**. “His efforts ensured the Board worked harder and smarter to investigate all matters addressed to the Board. Bobby was indefatigable on limiting the use of solitary and restraints, on meeting requirements for, and increasing, access to healthcare and recreation, on investigating deaths and implementing the changes that those investigations showed were needed, and more. He used evidence, logic, common sense, and conscience to challenge dangerous and irrational policies and conditions. I hope his approach and impact at the Board will continue to serve as a model to all of us seeking safety, justice, and decarceration.”

“Throughout his career, Bobby Cohen has been an unwavering commitment to justice and a steadfast advocate for meaningful reform within our criminal legal system,” said **Stanley Richards**, President and CEO of The Fortune Society and former Vice Chair of the Board of Correction. “I am deeply grateful to have worked alongside Bobby for nearly three decades; he is not only a friend and mentor but also a tireless partner in the fight to uplift the voices of those impacted by incarceration and to safeguard the dignity of the most vulnerable. His principled leadership and courageous voice on the Board have been instrumental in advancing accountability, transparency, and the protection of human rights. His legacy of service and fearless truth-telling will shape the future of criminal justice reform for generations to come.”

**Stanley Brezenoff**, former Board of Correction Chair, said, “From a sometimes adversary, frequent ally and always an admirer, a heartfelt salute to a seemingly tireless warrior who soldiered on in the face of often intractable resistance, never faltering or losing sight of the moral imperatives. He was heard. He made a difference.”

Former Board Member **Jacqueline Sherman** said, “During his long tenure on the Board, Bobby never wavered in his steadfast commitment to justice, integrity, and humanity in the administration of the City's jails. I deeply appreciated his generosity in sharing his experience and expertise and benefited greatly from it. His service has had an enduring impact on the Board and on the lives of people who live and work in the jails.”

“Relentless reformer; compassionate leader; brilliant criminal justice expert,” said **Michele Ovesey**, former Board of Correction General Counsel and Interim Executive Director. “Dr. Robert Cohen – “Bobby” – exemplified these attributes over his many years of service to the City of New York, to the Board of Correction, and most importantly, to the men and women detained in the City’s jails. Bobby was everything a Board Member should be and more. He had an opinion on every issue and expressed it clearly and courageously. He was a source of tremendous support to Board staff – the field staff, the researchers, the lawyers, and the support staff. He never stopped fighting – in the face of so many obstacles – for what was true and right. Bobby left an indelible mark on the Board which will be cherished and, hopefully, will serve as a beacon for change in the years to come”