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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
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CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

NEW YORK CITY TO CLOSE FIRST JAIL ON RIKERS ISLAND BY SUMMER 2018

Made possible by historic reductions in jail population, the closure of a facility is a major step in Mayor de Blasio's plan to close Rikers Island

NEW YORK—The de Blasio Administration announced today that it will close its first jail on Rikers Island this summer as part of [Mayor de Blasio's plan to close Rikers Island](#). The closure is made possible by the dramatic reduction of the City's jail population, which fell below 9,000 for the month of December, a record-low figure last reported in 1982. As of January 1, the Department of Correction's jail population is 8,705.

"Every day we are making New York City's jail system smaller and safer," said **Mayor de Blasio**. "This announcement is an important step in our plan to close Rikers Island and create more community-based facilities to better serve people in custody and our hard-working correctional staff."

"The Department of Correction and the City are committed to closing Rikers and today, we begin delivering on that commitment," **Department of Correction Commissioner Cynthia Brann** said. "It is something we are able to do because of our Department's reforms in creating safer jails and the City's work in creating a fairer criminal justice system. Under Mayor de Blasio's administration, we have reduced our jail population by 21 percent and have helped make our jails safer. We will continue building on our progress in reducing our jail population through programs that provide life and work skills that help individuals in custody re-enter our community."

Elizabeth Glazer, Director of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and co-chair of the Justice Implementation Task Force said, "Closing a jail is one of many steps toward modernizing our entire justice system. We are reimagining and reforming how jails function as we are safely shrinking the size of the population. This work is possible because of the partnership, from both inside and outside government, to reduce the jail population in a way that makes New York City safer for everyone."

Corporation Counsel Zachary Carter, who co-chairs the Justice Implementation Task Force, said, “The closure of GMDC recognizes the new reality of a substantially smaller jail population whose programmatic and facilities needs must be managed toward a safe and humane environment.”

The DOC will close the George Motchan Detention Center, which currently houses about 600 men in custody. Its closure will bring the total number of operational Rikers Island facilities from nine to eight and it will not result in layoffs or a reduction in DOC uniformed staff. Instead, it will help DOC reduce overtime, provide important training and support, and strengthen staff in other key areas. In the coming months, DOC will develop plans on the transfer of uniformed staff and detainees to other facilities.

In March, Mayor Bill de Blasio and Speaker Melissa Mark Viverito announced the plan to close Rikers Island and create a jail system that is smaller, safer and fairer. Because existing borough-based facilities have the capacity to house only approximately 2,300 people, there is no immediate way to safely house the current DOC population off-Island. Expanding the capacity in the boroughs while simultaneously implementing a series of strategies to significantly reduce the jail population is currently underway. The Justice Implementation Task Force will coordinate the work of the many groups inside and outside of government to ensure effective implementation of the Mayor’s roadmap. The complete Roadmap, along with real-time updates and opportunities to get involved, is available at nyc.gov/CloseRikers.

The City recently launched a request-for-proposals to identify sites that can eventually replace the jails on Rikers Island as well as assess the capacity of the three existing Department of Correction facilities in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens. The City’s jail reduction strategies include alternatives to incarceration as well as specialized services to reduce reoffending and put people on a path toward stability. This includes a citywide alternative to bail program – Supervised Release – that has diverted over 6,000 people from jail since launching in 2016. This program allows judges to assign eligible, lower-risk defendants to a supervisory program that enables them to remain at home with their families and continue working while awaiting trial. Supervised Release has been funded in part by the District Attorney of Manhattan’s office.

Last October, the City launched a new program that will replace short jail sentences for minor, low-level offenses (typically under 30 days) with services that help prevent recidivism. Working with the district attorneys in Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx, the program gives judges the option of sentencing people to these community-based programs rather than jail. Additionally, in 2017, the Administration also announced that every person in the Department of Correction’s custody will receive re-entry services to help connect them with jobs and opportunities outside of jail, as well as five hours of programming per day to address vocational, educational, and therapeutic needs.

Within jails, the Department of Correction began a series of sweeping reforms in late 2015 that included programs for individuals in custody, increasing security camera coverage, equipping officers with training in de-escalation techniques, safety equipment and protective gear, and creating a classification and housing strategy to safely house individuals in custody. The

Department's reforms have resulted in a 65 percent drop in assaults on staff with serious injury and a 53 percent drop in uses of force with serious injury since 2014.

New York City has the lowest incarceration rate of any large U.S. city with an incarceration rate of 167 per 100,000 versus 229 in LA, 252 in Chicago, 338 in Houston and 784 in Philadelphia in 2016. In addition to New York City's plunging jail population crime rates also fell to historic lows not seen in generations.

Assemblyman Luis Sepulveda said, "Faced with a major, complex issue, I am glad to see that Mayor de Blasio and his administration are making headway in solving the situation at Rikers Island. Sometimes it takes one step at a time, but I'm confident more steps will quickly follow to reach the ultimate goal of closing Rikers Island. I believe the overall plan, which includes diversion plans to avoid jail, as well as alternatives to bail programs will go a long way in reducing the prison population. Keep up the good work!"

"The closure of the George Motchan Detention Center on Rikers Island is evidence of this administration's commitment to criminal justice reform. By offering low level offenders alternatives to incarceration, enacting supervised release for low risk defendants, and supporting other paths to stability; this city is proving that it's possible to lower crime while ending the cycle of incarceration that too many find themselves caught in," said **Assemblyman David Weprin, Assembly Correction Committee Chair**. "I am proud to stand with Mayor Bill De Blasio as we take another step towards a better, fairer and safer New York."

Former New York State Chief Judge and Chair of the Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform Jonathan Lippman said: "Today's announcement of the closure of one of the jails on Rikers represents an important step in the right direction and with the historic reduction in New York City's jail population, it is clear that mass incarceration is not a prerequisite to keeping New York safe. The sooner new, smaller, state-of-the-art jail facilities are designed and sited in the boroughs, the sooner all of the horrific jails on Rikers Island will be a thing of the past."

"The City's decision to shutter a sprawling, decrepit jail like George Motchan Detention Center is a great start to a new year," said **Tina Luongo, Attorney-In-Charge of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. "The key is to ensure that we continue to reduce the population of every single facility and until we close Rikers Island, also ensure that programming continues to serve people who are detained."

"All New Yorkers should be proud and encouraged by the progress being made in closing Rikers Island with the closure of the first building in the summer of 2018. The thoughtful dedication to this effort by the Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice is to be applauded. This announcement is proof that together we can succeed," said **Soffiyah Elijah, Executive Director of Alliance of Families for Justice**.

"Any day you can close a jail is a good day. We are happy to see the City maintaining focus on people in the City's jails and taking action to address the conditions in which people are living, while at the same time working to reduce the jail population. Osborne has been working at

GMDC and other Rikers jails for many years; it is good to note that we were not the only ones to notice its many infrastructure challenges due to age and design, and hope to see continued improvements in conditions in all jail settings, including proper program and living spaces,” said **Elizabeth Gaynes, President and CEO of the Osborne Association & Co-Chair, Working Group on Safely Reducing the Size of the Jail Population.**

JoAnne Page, President and CEO of the Fortune Society said, “In shutting down GMDC, Mayor de Blasio has moved us one important step nearer – both symbolic and concrete – to closing Rikers Island. But, the challenge ahead is a significant one: how to keep taking the big steps needed to increase both justice and community safety. Achieving this will require bringing down our jail population by locking up fewer people and processing cases faster, while ensuring that critical alternative to incarceration and reentry services – like those provided by Fortune and our sister agencies - are available to keep people from recidivating. Nothing less than a coordinated and full-scale effort by those in the criminal- and social-justice communities will be required. At Fortune, where more than half of our staff and much of our leadership have been incarcerated at Rikers, we understand why this is so important and we will continue to work with the Mayor to make this an achievable reality.”

“Today’s announcement that the City will close GMDC is a welcome down payment on the commitment to close Rikers Island. It is made possible by the drop in the NYC correctional population to below 9,000 – a 20 percent decline since the Mayor took office four years ago. We still have a long way to get to the target of 5,000 and planning for new, state-of-the-art facilities; both the City and the State will need to lean into this massively this year and in the years to come. However, this is a productive and concrete step, and the Mayor should be applauded for taking it,” said **Nicholas Turner, President, Vera Institute of Justice.**

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