

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS

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IN THE MATTER OF:

PUBLIC HEARING: COMMISSION ON COMMUNITY
REINVESTMENT AND THE CLOSURE OF RIKERS ISLAND

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DATE: May 30, 2025

TIME: 9:00 a.m.

MODERATOR: MARLOWE PARAISO
Director of Special Projects

ALSO PRESENT: SARITA DAFTARY
VIDAL GUZMAN
JESSENIA FAJARDO
TAMMY REED
JOSE MARTE

DIGITALLY RECORDED PROCEEDING, TRANSCRIBED BY:
POLLYANNA HYRE
ACOLAD

1 AUTOMATED VOICE: Recording in progress.

2 MR. MARLOWE PARAISO: Good morning. My name is
3 Marlowe Paraiso. I will be moderating today's public
4 hearing. I am a Filipino American male with black hair
5 and brown eyes. I have eyeglasses on and I am wearing a
6 blue suit and blue shirt. Thank you for joining us for
7 today's Commission on Community Reinvestment and the
8 Closure of Rikers Island public hearing. We will start in
9 a few minutes, at 9:05, to give everyone a chance to join
10 the meeting.

11 Once again, we will start in a few minutes at
12 9:05 to give everyone a chance to join the meeting.
13 Everyone is muted at this point. Thank you so much.

14 MS. CHERYL WERTZ: Go ahead, Tatiana.

15 COURT INTERPRETER: (Speaking in Spanish).

16 MS. WERTZ: Tatiana, I'm going to leave you here
17 to repeat that message again just before we start.

18 COURT INTERPRETER: Okay.

19 MR. PARAISO: Good morning. It's 9:05, so we
20 will start the public hearing. Thank you for joining us
21 for today's Commission on Community Reinvestment and the
22 Closure of Rikers Island public hearing. First of all, I
23 want to acknowledge the Commission members who are present
24 and joining us today, Kandra Clark, as well as I thought I
25 saw him, but he is not here anymore. But Kandra Clark is

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1 a Commission member, so I want to acknowledge their
2 presence.

3 MS. WERTZ: Let's let Tatiana repeat our message
4 in Spanish and then continue.

5 MR. PARAISO: Perfect.

6 MS. WERTZ: Tatiana, can you repeat our
7 directions for Spanish language interpretation?

8 COURT INTERPRETER: (Speaking in Spanish).

9 MR. PARAISO: I will ask the interpreters to
10 introduce themselves and provide instructions on how to
11 receive interpretation services. We will start with the
12 Spanish interpreter.

13 MS. WERTZ: I think we're good on that.

14 MR. PARAISO: Okay. And American Sign Language,
15 are we good on that also? Perfect. Thank you.

16 Again, welcome and thank you for attending
17 today's hearing. As I stated, my name is Marlowe Paraiso
18 and I am the director of special projects at the
19 Department of Social Services in the Office of the
20 Commissioner. I am a Filipino American male with black
21 hair and brown eyes. I have eyeglasses on. I am wearing
22 a blue suit and a blue shirt. I will be moderating
23 today's hearing. Anyone who wishes to comment will have
24 three minutes to speak. I will not be answering any
25 questions or responding to your comments today, but please

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1 know that your comments will be shared with the
2 Commission.

3 If you wish to submit written testimony, please
4 send your testimony by midnight today, May 30th. Comments
5 can be emailed to reinvestment@dss.nyc.gov. Once again,
6 comments can be emailed to reinvestment@dss.nyc.gov.

7 Speakers will be called in the order they signed
8 up. I have pasted the names in the chat box. For those
9 who did not sign up but wish to speak, please raise your
10 hand. If you're using the Zoom desktop application or
11 browser, click the Reactions icon at the bottom right of
12 the webinar control toolbar to raise your hand. On your
13 phone, click on the horizontal dot icons labeled More at
14 the bottom of the screen and then click on Raise Hand from
15 the pop up. If you have joined this hearing by calling
16 in, you can raise your hand by pressing *9. If you need
17 help, let us know in the chat.

18 So we have our first speaker, I see their face.
19 So Sarita, I give you the floor and you have three
20 minutes.

21 MS. SARITA DAFTARY: Good morning and thank you.
22 My name is Sarita Daftary. I'm a co-director of Freedom
23 Agenda and one of the organizations -- we're one of the
24 organizations leading the campaign to close Rikers. Our
25 members have been incarcerated at Rikers or had loved ones

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1 incarcerated there. And overwhelmingly there are also
2 people who have for decades watched the basic needs of
3 their communities go unmet while billions are spent each
4 year to incarcerate their family and neighbors.

5 Between 1979 and 1980, actually incarcerated men
6 at Green Haven Correctional Facility conducted research
7 that came to be known as the seven neighborhood study, and
8 it revealed that over 75 percent of New York State's
9 prison population came from seven New York City
10 neighborhoods. And that reality remains largely the same
11 today. The cumulative effect of this has been
12 devastating, and this Commission was established to
13 finally begin to repair the decades of harm done by mass
14 incarceration and community disinvestment.

15 So we're very excited about the work of this
16 Commission. While we were eagerly waiting for this
17 Commission to resume its public hearings as required by
18 law, we had conversations of our own with residents and
19 communities with the highest rates of admission to Rikers.

20 Between August and October 2024, in partnership
21 with community-based organizations, we organized forums in
22 South Jamaica, Harlem, and the Bronx in the South Bronx.
23 And we asked residents, how do you want to see the money
24 that has been used for Rikers and mass incarceration
25 reinvested in your community? So I'm going to read off a

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1 few of their answers and I'm also going to send a fuller
2 written listing of the dozens of responses that we
3 received.

4 A lot of the responses clustered around housing,
5 mental health, opportunities for young people, including
6 after school programs, and investment in education. But
7 I'll read off a couple of kind of representative
8 specifics. So this is from our forum in Jamaica, Queens
9 in August. I recall all of my high school teachers being
10 directly from Long island and not from Rockaway. The
11 requirements for a teacher is a master's degree. Higher
12 education is needed within the Far Rockaway community. So
13 participants in that forum came from both Jamaica, Queens,
14 and other parts of Southeast Queens, including Far
15 Rockaway.

16 Another response from Harlem in September 2020
17 2024, sorry. Start early. Ensure there are programs such
18 as after school programs, mental health programs, as early
19 as elementary school and throughout school years, arts and
20 music, and physical health programs, emphasis on reading
21 aptitude. Anything that will show children there's a
22 wider world than their street or neighborhood. Family
23 counseling via social workers in early years of childhood.

24 And finally from the Bronx later that fall. Any
25 program or service that will help combat poverty and help

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1 people who are struggling, especially the youth. Expose
2 the children to multiple positive recreational activities.
3 Sports, chess, robotics, art, dance, poetry, journalism,
4 field trips to cultural centers like museums and sports
5 stadiums. Help mothers and fathers who are dealing with
6 homelessness, addiction, unemployment get back on their
7 feet by receiving the wraparound services and community
8 support they need to be restored. We ultimately need a
9 second Bill of Human Rights which will include the right
10 to meaningful employment, to good health, the right to
11 nutritious quality food and water, and the right to
12 worship and speak freely, and the right to peace and
13 security for ourselves and family and community.

14 I know this was a mission of Martin Luther King
15 with his Poor People's campaign, but it was never
16 realized. The Bronx and communities throughout this
17 nation and the world need to build and forever sustain the
18 heart centered and people oriented institutions that make
19 a loving family, community, and society possible. We need
20 a Marshall Plan for the Bronx. I forget where I heard
21 this idea, but I agree with this kind of big picture
22 thinking.

23 So that's just a summary. I don't think I could
24 say it better than them. And there are dozens more
25 responses like this. And I would say that every time we

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1 talk to people, we've been having these conversations with
2 people actually since 2018 in different forms. And the
3 results are remarkably consistent. So thank you.

4 MR. PARAISO: Thank you so much. So the next
5 person I see who is in the room is Vidal Guzman.

6 MR. VIDAL GUZMAN: Hey, how you doing? So
7 sorry, I didn't know you was going to call me right next.
8 Go right in?

9 MR. PARAISO: Yes, at three minutes.

10 MR. GUZMAN: My name is Vidal Guzman. I'm the
11 executive director of an organization called America on
12 Trial. We are a grassroots movement grounded in life --
13 lived experience of system impacted and driven by the hope
14 of community-led liberation. I'm not just speaking as a,
15 you know, nonprofit leader, but someone who grew up in
16 Harlem and who was also incarcerated at Rikers at 16 and
17 again at 19. I know the trauma of that place not through
18 headlines, but due to a lot of experience. I walked
19 through the hallways. I felt the harm being discarded by
20 the system, criminalizing poverty and punishing youth
21 instead of protecting them.

22 Close Rikers can't be the end of the chapters.
23 It must be a beginning of a new one rooted in healing,
24 investment, and opportunity for community it was built to
25 cage. To get there, we need support and we need to expand

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1 training youth and adults for tech jobs so our community
2 are not left behind in the economy of tomorrow. We have
3 the talent. We just need the access.

4 Harlem, Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island
5 needs real pipelines to tech careers now. We also need to
6 expand the Cure Violence program, especially in Harlem, a
7 similar approach to show the conditions that leads to
8 violence, not because of who we are, but because of the
9 disinvestment. Credible messengers are saving lives.
10 They need real support to keep doing their work. And we
11 need investments in programs that reconnect black and
12 brown communities with nature hiking, nature walk, open
13 air. These are basic needs to help us heal and see beyond
14 the concrete and the survival. And our people deserve
15 that.

16 And I say the last thing. Closing Rikers must
17 not be a symbol. It must be a commitment to fund bold and
18 grassroots solutions led by those who have lived the harm
19 and are building the way forward. Thank you for your
20 time.

21 MR. PARAIISO: Thank you so much. So the next
22 person I see is Shakira Williams and I think Jessenia will
23 be speaking on your behalf, correct?

24 MS. SHAKIRA WILLIAMS: Yes, thank you.

25 MR. PARAIISO: So three minutes. Thank you.

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1 MS. JESSENIA FAJARDO: Hi, good morning,
2 everyone. I wrote a few things down. My name is
3 Jessenia.

4 MR. PARAISO: Sorry, you muted yourself.

5 MS. FAJARDO: I'm sorry. Good morning,
6 everyone. My name is Jessenia Fajardo and I wrote some
7 stuff down. I'm justice impacted. I just came home from
8 doing three and a half years in June of 2024 and I'm here
9 to urge the City to invest in people, specifically those
10 most often left out of opportunity. I propose that New
11 York City fund target, sorry, fund targeted scholarships
12 and mentoring partners from formerly incarcerated students
13 and launch community based initiatives for the children of
14 incarcerated parents. Especially in understanding
15 boroughs like the Bronx. Re-entry is not just about
16 housing or employment. It's about education, healing, and
17 the tools to rebuild one's life.

18 Many justice impacted students want to continue
19 their education but are navigating overwhelming barriers
20 from financial aid confusion, to stigma, time management,
21 and trauma. City funded mentoring programs compare these
22 students with trained guided -- with trained guides,
23 people who understand their unique journeys and can walk
24 them through FAFSA, class registration, and academic
25 planning. With the right support these students don't

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1 just survive, they thrive. But we must go deeper. For
2 every person incarcerated, there's often a child left
3 behind, a child at risk of falling through the cracks.

4 I call on the City to expand funding for after
5 school programs and youth leadership initiatives in the
6 Bronx and other historical neglected areas. These
7 programs should uplift youth, center their voices, and
8 expose them to mentors who look like them, who've been
9 through it and come out on the other side. Children of
10 incarcerated parents deserve more than silence and shame.
11 They deserve attention, investment, and hope. This is not
12 a charity. It's a justice.

13 My son was left from 7 to 11 years old without a
14 mother. His father also passed away while I was
15 incarcerated. There's the wait list for Big Brother
16 mentors are very long, and navigating, you know, I will be
17 earning my bachelor's degree next semester and navigating
18 this was very tough in the very beginning, and I do try to
19 help others. Others like my sisters in bondage and
20 everyone that comes to me that needs help, but I hit a lot
21 of hurdles before that.

22 I feel like my time is almost up. So sorry.
23 Thank you.

24 MR. PARAIISO: You have 30 more seconds, so if
25 you want to say anything else.

1 MS. FAJARDO: Yes, and also, when I came home,
2 their -- to wait for a child care voucher, you have to
3 wait, like, about 45 days, which is completely insane,
4 because what am I supposed to do for 45 days before I get
5 a childcare voucher? Sit home and do nothing? But the
6 community wants us to thrive and succeed, and how can we
7 thrive and succeed? So, yeah, thank you.

8 MR. PARAISSO: Thank you so much. So the next
9 person I have on the list who is in the room is Tammy
10 Reed. So whenever you're ready.

11 MS. TAMMY REED: Hi, my name is Tammy Reed, and
12 I'm with Freedom Agenda, and I have a son who's been
13 impacted by the system. And a couple of things I want to
14 mention. Next week, I'm going to be joining as a, you
15 know, I'm going to work for an organization, a nonprofit,
16 called Family Enrichment Center. And last night, there
17 was a meeting. I sat in on a meeting, and I asked the
18 director, what do you need? And the -- there's a lot of
19 organizations here in Southeast Queens, they need money
20 for programming. That's the bottom line. They're limited
21 with what they could do. We were talking about different
22 ideas, services, offerings for the community, but without
23 the money, there are certain things we just can't do. We
24 need to have that money come back into the community to
25 assist these people.

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1 In addition, I spoke to my son, and I told him
2 about this Zoom call and jobs, from his perspective, job
3 opportunities, investing in people coming out for jobs and
4 not just the traditional jobs. He said a lot of, he's met
5 a lot of talented people, maybe investing in
6 entrepreneurship and so forth, different programs for
7 people to express themselves via jobs and so forth. But
8 the bottom line is there's lots of organizations out here
9 and I'm going to be, like I said, start working for one.
10 But they need money in order to continue to serve the
11 community. That's just the bottom line. They need the
12 money.

13 MR. PARAISO: Thank you so much for sharing.

14 And does anyone else who I did not call wish to
15 testify? If so, raise your hand. And I want to double
16 check, is Mar Hernandez in the room? I do not see your
17 name, but just want to double check. Okay. So we will be
18 here until 11:00 a.m. If anyone else wishes to testify,
19 please encourage them to do so.

20 Oh, Jose, did you want to -- perfect, perfect.

21 MR. JOSE MARTE: You know, I have a son that did
22 prison time and you know, a lot of it, some of the
23 testimony starts in schooling, you know, bullying in
24 schools. A lot of it, it's really, you know, it starts
25 there, then the choices that you've made. And also, you

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1 know, I also used to run Boys and Girls Clubs and other
2 youth programs. There are a lot of things out there, but
3 what has changed over time is the staffing and the
4 professionals that are committed enough so you can, you
5 have a lot of programs out there, but the access to the
6 programs is a bit of an issue. Right? You do have a lot
7 of turnover in staff. You have to really invest in Cure
8 Violence programs that are embedded in the schools. As
9 Mr. Vidal said, you had to embed them in Boys and Girls
10 Clubs, in YMCAs, because it's not about just getting a
11 person that has a degree, it's about getting a person that
12 really understands the youth, that's not afraid to do this
13 work.

14 A lot of it is really, like, give you an
15 example, YMCAs, they cost money. Who pays for these
16 programs? Access to these things are a bit of an issue.
17 We always see ATI programs and I've been your Bronx
18 Connect and sometimes we do. We can't do everything but
19 trying to get them into more quality programs. It costs
20 money. It costs money to get them into boxing programs
21 and other things. You know, a lot of these things are
22 really scratching the surface. Not enough of a follow up.
23 And also when you lose key staff, right? So again, a lot
24 of it is also, you know, you may have a good case manager,
25 they may not get paid enough. You have that turnover in

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1 people. You're actually what we're contributing to is the
2 turnover and contributing to the abandonment issues that
3 some participants have.

4 You know, so maybe there wasn't a positive role
5 model. And then you have a case manager, someone that
6 maybe made an impact, but that person has to feed their
7 family, right? And so then you lose that person. That
8 constant turnover I think perpetuates -- it works against
9 what we're doing. We can design good programs, but if you
10 don't keep people around, that's an issue. And I remember
11 again, many years ago when there were people where they
12 could pay their bills and do this work in the community,
13 but the turnover has been a big problem.

14 Yeah, that's pretty much it. Thank you so much.
15 Oh, one last thing. I will say this also, the other
16 biggie is the transition. When people transition from
17 prison or jail to the community, there are very often a
18 lot of undiagnosed issues that occur depending on the time
19 that a person served, right? If a person got addicted to
20 drugs, very often there's an issue. You know, I testify
21 even my own son when he became addicted to drugs was when
22 he was incarcerated. You know, that's a real problem.
23 And so diagnosing these things, people coming out with
24 trauma for incarceration, they're not getting, you know,
25 we've helped people when they come in at a Rikers. If you

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1 take that bus coming out of Rikers, you will see some
2 people getting on that bus. They don't even know where
3 they're going. The lack of direction is just incredible.

4 You know, we've had to help people when we're
5 getting on that bus with Rikers, some people didn't even
6 know where they were going. They had no -- and that
7 affects, from the very beginning, you know, you have a
8 very vulnerable population that is not getting a good
9 transition to the community. So sometimes it starts
10 there.

11 MR. PARAISO: Thank you so much, Jose.

12 MR. MARTE: Thank you.

13 MR. PARAISO: So if anyone else wishes to
14 deliver testimony, feel free to unmute yourself. As I
15 shared earlier, the room will remain open until 11:00 a.m.
16 this morning. Our translators will continue to be on the
17 line, so encourage, your colleagues, friends, if they want
18 to share their thoughts, please, please encourage them to
19 join the room.

20 Again thank you for attending. Just a quick
21 reminder, if you have just joined us and wish to testify,
22 please raise your hand in the chat or press *9 if you're
23 calling in by phone. If you need translation assistance,
24 please let us know also.

25 COURT INTERPRETER: (Speaking in Spanish).

1 MR. PARAISO: Hello. If you have just joined us
2 and wish to testify, please raise your hand in the chat or
3 press *9 if you're calling in by your phone. Thank you so
4 much.

5 COURT INTERPRETER: (Speaking in Spanish)

6 MR. PARAISO: Good morning.

7 DR. DIVINE PRYOR: Good morning.

8 MR. PARAISO: Good morning. Just want to
9 acknowledge that we've been joined by another Commission
10 member, Dr. Pryor.

11 Good morning. If you have just joined us and
12 wish to testify, please raise your hand in the chat or
13 press *9 if you're calling in by phone. If you need
14 translation assistance, please also let us know. Thank
15 you.

16 COURT INTERPRETER: (Speaking in Spanish)

17 MR. PARAISO: If you have just joined us and
18 wish to testify, please raise your hand in the chat or
19 press *9 if you're calling in by phone. If you need
20 translation assistance, please also let us know.

21 COURT INTERPRETER: (Speaking in Spanish).

22 MR. PARAISO: Good morning. If you have just
23 joined us and wish to testify, please raise your hand in
24 the chat or press *9 if you're calling in by phone. If
25 you need translation assistance, please let us know.

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1 COURT INTERPRETER: (Speaking in Spanish).

2 MR. PARAISO: Good morning. It's about 10:46.
3 The hearing room will remain open until 11:00 a.m. If you
4 have just joined us and wish to testify, please raise your
5 hand in the chat or press *9 if you are calling in by
6 phone. If you need translation assistance, please also
7 let us know. Thank you.

8 COURT INTERPRETER: (Speaking in Spanish).

9 MR. PARAISO: Good morning. If you have joined
10 us and wish to testify, please raise your hand in the chat
11 or press *9 if you're calling in by phone. If you need
12 translation assistance, please let us know.

13 Thank you again for coming today and sharing
14 your comments. Please remember that written testimony
15 must be submitted at midnight today, May 30th. Comments
16 can be emailed to reinvestment@dss.nyc.gov. Once again,
17 comments can be emailed to reinvestment@dss.nyc.gov. A
18 transcript of today's hearing and written testimonies will
19 be posted on HRA's website in the Inside HRA section.

20 This concludes the public hearing. Enjoy the
21 rest of your day and thank you again for coming. Goodbye.

22 (Proceeding Concluded.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Pollyanna Hyre, certify that the foregoing transcript of proceedings in the New York City Department of Social Services, Office of Legal Affairs, Matter of Public Hearing: Commission on Community Reinvestment and the Closure of Rikers Island, was prepared using the required transcription equipment and is a true and accurate record of the proceedings.



06/03/2025

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