

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: August 26, 2025

HELD AT: ZOOM HEARING

1 MR. MARLOWE PARAISO: So, good morning. My name  
2 is Marlowe Paraiso. I will be moderating today's public  
3 hearing. I am a Filipino American male with black hair  
4 and brown eyes. I have eyeglasses on, and I'm wearing a  
5 blue suit, maybe a purple shirt. I can't tell. Thank you  
6 for joining us for today's, today's Commission on  
7 Community Reinvestment and the Closure of Rikers Island  
8 Public Hearing. We will start in a few minutes at 9:40 to  
9 give everyone a chance to join the meeting. Everyone is  
10 muted at this time. Thank you.

11 (Silence)

12 MR. PARAISO: So, once again, thank you so much  
13 for joining us for today's hearing. It's 9:40. We will  
14 start the public hearing. As I mentioned before, I thank  
15 you for joining us for today's Commission on Community  
16 Reinvestment and the Closure of Rikers Island Public  
17 Hearing. I will ask the interpreters to introduce  
18 themselves and provide instructions on how to receive  
19 interpretation services. We will start with the Spanish  
20 interpreter.

21 MS. ANDREA JURADO: My name is Andrea Jurado. I  
22 am an interpreter in Spanish. If you need to hear  
23 simultaneous interpretation in Spanish, you can click the  
24 balloon at the bottom of the screen and select Spanish.

25 MR. PARAISO: Thank you. And now the ASL

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1 interpreter.

2 ASL INTERPRETER: (Inaudible)

3 MR. PARAISO: Thank you so much. So again,  
4 welcome and thank you for attending today's hearing. My  
5 name is Marlowe Paraiso, and I am the director of special  
6 projects at the Department of Social Services, Office of  
7 the Commissioner. I am a Filipino American male with  
8 black hair and brown eyes. I have eyeglasses on. I am  
9 wearing a blue suit, and I think a purple shirt. I will  
10 be moderating today's hearing. Anyone who wishes to  
11 comment will have three minutes to speak. Thank you. I  
12 will not be answering any questions or responding to your  
13 comments. But please know that your comments will be  
14 shared with the commission. We actually have three  
15 commission members on the line: Darren, Jeremy, and also,  
16 Kandra. If you wish to send testimony, please send your  
17 testimony by midnight today, August 26. Comments can be  
18 emailed to [reinvestment@dss.nyc.gov](mailto:reinvestment@dss.nyc.gov). Transcripts of  
19 today's hearing and written testimonies will be posted on  
20 the HRA website and the Commission on Community  
21 Reinvestment and the Closure of Rikers Island Page.  
22 Speakers will be called in the order that they signed up.  
23 I will shortly paste the names in the chat box. Please  
24 state your name and the name of the organization you  
25 represent, if applicable. For those who have not signed

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1 up but wish to speak, please raise your hand. If you're  
2 using the Zoom desktop application or browser. Click on  
3 the reactions icon at the bottom right of the webinar  
4 control toolbar. On your phone, click on the horizontal  
5 dot icons labeled more at the bottom of the screen, and  
6 then click on raise hand from the pop-up. If you have  
7 joined this hearing by calling in, you can raise your hand  
8 by pressing \*9. And if you need help, let us know in the  
9 chat box. And yes, Jason, are you with the Legal Action  
10 Center, Jason? Perfect. I already have you on the list.  
11 Thank you for signing up.

12 MR. JASON RODRIGUEZ: Yes, I am. Thank you.

13 MR. PARAISO: So with that, I will paste the  
14 names in the chat box, and we will call folks in this  
15 order. So, the first person is Thomas. Thomas, are you  
16 on the line? Next person is Justyna, and I see you on the  
17 screen whenever you're ready. You have three minutes to  
18 deliver your testimony.

19 MS. JUSTYNA RZEWINSKI: Okay. Thank you. Good  
20 morning. Thank you for allowing me to testify this  
21 morning. My name is Justyna Rzewinski, and I am a  
22 licensed clinical social worker. From December 2023 to  
23 September 2024, I worked in Rikers Island mental health  
24 units, where I saw people with serious mental illness  
25 suffering without care. Over a decade working with people

1 on parole, and saw many cycle in and out of jail, not  
2 because they weren't trying, but because the odds were  
3 stacked against them, released into places like 125th and  
4 Lexington, surrounded by drugs. They were expected to  
5 succeed under impossible conditions. On Rikers, I saw  
6 people locked in cells without medication, sunlight, or  
7 human contact left to deteriorate until they smeared  
8 feces, banged on doors, and screamed in despair. Others  
9 call the sick line for help again and again, yet officers  
10 never came. Their charts were falsified or refused. In  
11 June 2025 alone, over 8,000 medical appointments were  
12 marked this way; many requested by patients themselves.  
13 People in the mental health units are also denied GED  
14 classes and programming despite DOC swearing each  
15 individual on Rikers has access to these services. The  
16 truth is simple. There is no mental health treatment on  
17 Rikers, only torture. This is why Rikers Island must  
18 close. Right now, it costs \$1,500 per person per day to  
19 keep someone on Rikers. Closing it would save New York  
20 City 2.2 billion every year. That money could instead of  
21 fund thousands of supportive housing units, expand mental  
22 health courts across the city, fully staff mobile  
23 treatment and forensic act teams, and create desperately  
24 needed residential treatment beds. These programs have  
25 been proven to work in 2023 mobile behavioral health,

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1 delivered 40,320 individual services across intensive  
2 mobile treatment, FACT, and ACT teams. According to the  
3 New York State Office of Mental Health dashboard, by early  
4 2024, ACT teams reduced homelessness by 56%, psychiatric  
5 hospitalizations by 52%, and criminal legal involvement by  
6 32%, mental health and drug courts, 52%, and criminal  
7 legal involvement by 36%. Mental health and drug courts,  
8 lowering by 36%. Mental health and drug courts lower  
9 reoffending rates by 50%. And therefore, bills like the  
10 Treatment Court Expansion Act need to be passed to make  
11 our communities safer by providing real resources,  
12 support, and treatment for those who need it the most. In  
13 other words, every dollar we see on Rikers Island could be  
14 used to build systems of care that actually reduce crime,  
15 improve health, and strengthen community safety. And we  
16 must do better. Real public safety and recovery will  
17 never come from cages. It will come from strong  
18 compassion and effective community resources. Thank you.

19 MR. PARAISO: Thank you so much. Next up is  
20 Oliver. Oliver, are you in the room? And next person is  
21 Davina Andrews. Are you in the room? And Victor, are you  
22 in the room? Before I call up the next set of  
23 individuals--also, we have been joined by our new  
24 commission member, Ms. Evelyn Graham. So, she is also on  
25 the call. She is an appointee from the Public Advocate's

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1 Office. I will be pasting the next five names. And I see  
2 Tammy Reed. So, Tammy, whenever you're ready.

3 MS. TAMMY REED: Thank you for allowing me to  
4 speak. I'm a member of Freedom Agenda. And I'm here  
5 because I am--happened to live in one of the areas, one of  
6 the seven areas where the statistic tells us that a lot of  
7 people end up being in Rikers incarcerated, and I just  
8 think I can I say we can reduce those numbers by providing  
9 services. And I kind of wear two hats. I'm also a  
10 volunteer in my community for community connections,  
11 Family Enrichment Center, which is right down the block.  
12 We do a lot in the community for kids, adults. If you  
13 come in there, we feed you and so forth. But I just found  
14 out we have a budget of \$40,000 a year. That's not  
15 enough. And these are the top; this is where I want to  
16 see. Some of the money's going once right through this  
17 close to come into the community to come back into the  
18 community. And come to the organization that I volunteer  
19 at. We're getting ready to do youth empowerment, women  
20 empowerment. There's so many different things we did. We  
21 just did a back-to-school, but it costs money. We have  
22 teenagers that come there just to stay out of trouble.  
23 They come and they can play games. But again, everybody  
24 who comes in there, we fix them something to eat so they  
25 don't have to worry about it. Bonded Circle group for

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1 mothers. Most of the mothers are in shelter, so they  
2 receive some services. But they need things for their  
3 kids. That, that's not being provided by the city, and  
4 that's where we come in. We try to get them what they  
5 need. It may be a car seat, it may be a stroller, it  
6 could be any number of things. Plus, we get them support.  
7 We're not a mental health facility, but the group is there  
8 for them to talk about what--any issues that are going on  
9 in their, in their lives, and we're a resource center. If  
10 they do have something going on, we can refer them out  
11 because we work with a lot of community-based  
12 organizations we partner with them. But I do see because  
13 of the numbers that are stacked against my community,  
14 which is Southeast Jamaica Queens, the numbers are stacked  
15 against us, and we need the money put back into the  
16 community so that we could reduce those numbers, and I  
17 feel that it can be done because I think we're doing great  
18 work at the community center. I love it there. I'm very  
19 proud to be a member there. And that's pretty much it.  
20 Get that money back to the community.

21 MR. PARAISSO: Thank you so much, Tammy. Great  
22 to see you again. And I think there's a question in the  
23 chat box up for you. Thank you. So whenever you get a  
24 chance, if you can do us a favor and answer it. Where is  
25 your site located is the question?

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1 MS. REED: Oh, it's on Linden Boulevard and  
2 203rd Street. It's Community Connections. Downing and  
3 Richmond Center. I believe there are a few Family  
4 Enrichment Centers located throughout the boroughs, and  
5 this one is Community Connections. So, come out and visit  
6 us. It's a great place.

7 MR. PARAISO: Okay, thank you. The next person  
8 is, Idra Alvarez, Idra Alvarez. Yeah, Aisha, Brian. Ty.  
9 And next person is a Vidal Guzman. Great to see you  
10 again.

11 MR. VIDAL GUZMAN: Hey, how you doing? My name  
12 is Vidal Guzman. I am the founder and executive director  
13 of an organization called America on Trial Inc., short for  
14 AOT. I'm also a survivor of Rikers Island. I grew up in  
15 the West Side of Harlem, a community where nearly every  
16 block carries the story of someone who have been touched  
17 by Rikers. I'm here because our community deserved  
18 better. First, we need a safe and welcome space for our  
19 youth. Park should be a place of joy where young people  
20 can play, build friendships, grow, not places marked by  
21 fear, neglect, and discard needles. That's something that  
22 I've been seeing a lot of in our parks, closer to black  
23 and brown communities. In Harlem River, some of these  
24 parks where we've seen a lot of needles, where a lot of  
25 young kids are playing second, we must invest in year-

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1 round youth employment, not just summer jobs. Young  
2 people deserve a steady pathway to responsibilities,  
3 growth, and long-term success. Weekend jobs and multi-  
4 year programs keep, help keep them engaged, support, and  
5 connected to their neighborhoods. You know, offering  
6 these jobs that some of these parks are missing will be a  
7 really great opportunity for you to get into those spaces.  
8 Third, I've been saying this before, our community must  
9 not be left out of the technology economy. Too many  
10 neighborhoods impacted by Rikers remain locked out of  
11 access to tech trainings, resources, and opportunities.  
12 And you know, these are six-figure jobs, and they're not  
13 judging people of all their backgrounds. Unless we close  
14 this gap, this cycle will repeat itself, and we'll keep  
15 seeing our people not being put in those spaces. And  
16 finally, I think this is the most important, we must  
17 strengthen nonprofits that are rooted in our neighborhood.  
18 Too often, local organizations are pushed out by rising  
19 rates, rents. We need a budget, a policy framework that  
20 allows your nonprofit to stay for long terms, build trust,  
21 sustain relationships and provide the services our family  
22 rely on. This is not about --, this is about dignity.  
23 This is about opportunity. This is about equity. Above  
24 this is about ensuring that community like minds are no  
25 longer left behind. Thank you for your time, your

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1 leadership, and your commitment to listening to the voices  
2 of those most impacted. Okay. Hi, PC.

3 MR. PARAIISO: Thank you so much. So I will go  
4 to the next list of 5 people.

5 AUTOMATED VOICE: You are unmuted.

6 MR. PARAIISO: So, the first name is Angelica.  
7 Next person is Casey.

8 AUTOMATED VOICE: You are muted.

9 MR. PARAIISO: And the next speaker, see them on  
10 video, Christine. Oh, I'm sorry. Yes, Chris--yes, you.  
11 You're on mute, though. You're on mute.

12 MS. CHRISTINE PAHIGIAN: Here we go. Good  
13 morning, everybody. Thank you for this. And this is one  
14 of those moments where I have about 57 pieces of paper in  
15 scribbles so that I can get my three minutes on time. So,  
16 bear with me. I am really grateful for this opportunity.  
17 My name is Chris Pahigian, and I serve as the executive  
18 director of Youth Justice Network, which many people know  
19 as Friends of Island Academy. We were born 35 years ago  
20 on the school floors of Rikers Island, specifically within  
21 the sentence facility where, at that time, 16 to 18 were  
22 going to school under DOE. And on any given night, there  
23 were about 3,500 kids going to school on Rikers Island.  
24 And I say that because it's going to turn into something I  
25 just want to point out. So, in the poem that Amanda

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1 Gorman had written and recited at the inauguration of  
2 Biden, Joe Biden, her poem began with, "When day comes, we  
3 ask ourselves, where can we find light in this never-  
4 ending shade? So, right now, this subject area it's  
5 really about the long game, and it needs to be a long game  
6 that is immune to soundbites, political and other types of  
7 soundbites. What can we do if we have a million, \$1.2  
8 billion to spend on things that are not policing, on  
9 things that are not jail, on things that are not Rikers  
10 Island or any other variation of correction? It's a long  
11 game that we know today. When we look back 30 years, this  
12 long game has demonstrated that it can work. So,  
13 nationally over the last 30 years, violent crimes has been  
14 cut in half. Youth incarceration has dropped nearly 70%  
15 since 2000, and the reductions are not accidents. They  
16 reflect the long game and year over year [speaker muted]

17 MR. PARAISO: You muted yourself again.

18 MS. PAHIGIAN: And reentry wasn't even a term  
19 15, 20 years ago. It's a relatively new term, right? So,  
20 if we look backwards and then look forward, the long game  
21 has worked. So, what does that mean? That means that  
22 today, if we spend a billion-two for one year, that's not  
23 necessary. I think we need to commit to spend a billion-  
24 two every year for 10 years. And what could possibly  
25 happen if we do that? I feel like we would want to start

1 with an infrastructure. I treated this the way I  
2 understood it, which is imagine you have a billion-two.  
3 Doesn't get to go to correction. We, in this, on this  
4 screen and in this world and in our communities, we have a  
5 billion-two to spend the right way. What could we do with  
6 it? Well, we would create an infrastructure, a community  
7 infrastructure, commit to the 10 years, focus on a  
8 continuum, ground all the investments locally at  
9 neighborhood levels, center equity in everything that we  
10 do, and target some impact. By year 10, I want to be  
11 here. By year five, I want to be here. Just like by year  
12 one, we want to reduce the population of Rikers by X so  
13 that year over year, we can close it by year X. So, what  
14 could we do? What if we invested 20%, for example, to  
15 early childhood and family stability so that at the end of  
16 10 years, 100,000 kids under 10 got developmentally and  
17 appropriate trauma supports every year, that there's a 50%  
18 reduction in child neglect and abuse removals in the  
19 highest-need communities, and that we have long-term  
20 measurable gains in literacy and in reduced suspension  
21 from school. So, what if that's what \$200 million a year  
22 for 10 years could achieve? What about--

23 MR. PARAISO: [Interposing] Thank you. That's  
24 time.

25 MS. PAHIGIAN: May I just conclude with how

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1 Amanda Borman concluded? Which is, "For there is always  
2 light if we're only--if we're brave enough to see it, if  
3 we're brave enough to be it."

4 MR. PARAISO: Thank you so much. And we're also  
5 accepting written testimony. So, if you want to share  
6 your written testimony.

7 MS. PAHIGIAN: It will be less in Congress. I  
8 will do that. Thank you.

9 MR. PARAISO: Thank you. The next person is  
10 Clemese. I don't see him in the room. And I'm going to  
11 put the next list of folks. Bear with me. Okay, the next  
12 person is Eileen. Then Robert. Sekou. Serena. And  
13 Frances.

14 DR. FRANCES GETELES SHAPIRO: Hello. Yes, my  
15 name is Frances Geteles Shapiro, and I'm actually Dr.  
16 Frances Geteles. I'm a clinical psychologist.

17 MR. PARAISO: I'm sorry, Frances. This is  
18 Geteles, I think, is the, is the next speaker.

19 DR. SHAPIRO: Oh, sorry.

20 MR. PARAISO: Sorry about that. So, is Anthony  
21 in the room? Megan?

22 MR. ANTHONY SPRINGER: I'm sorry. I was having  
23 issues coming off a come off a mute. So, Anthony  
24 Springer, I'm here with Urban Youth Alliance or Bronx  
25 Connect. I just wanted to talk just briefly about the

1 importance of seeing Rikers not only close, but also  
2 seeing that the funds put to where it will be good, in  
3 good use. Our organization, Urban Youth Alliance, we work  
4 with young people who have been justice-involved, or who  
5 could potentially be justice-involved. We also have our  
6 re-entry services that serve, that service all ages. And  
7 what we're seeing really is just when people are given the  
8 opportunity, they're given resources that are sorely  
9 needed, that what they're doing is not going back to what  
10 they have been doing, what caused them to get into that  
11 trouble. Our communities really need these investments.  
12 We're in areas that are under-resourced as far as jobs, as  
13 far as even food security, homes, and everything else like  
14 that. So, when we're looking at what money could be  
15 useful instead of by incarcerating people, we understand  
16 that the true cost of continuing on like we have been is  
17 our communities, our young people, our friends, and  
18 neighbors. So, I just wanted to mention there that it is  
19 vitally important that we use the funds that are going  
20 towards Rikers to service and help community. Thank you.

21 MR. PARAIISO: Thank you so much. Next person,  
22 Megan. Dr. Victoria Phillips. And I see Cecilia is  
23 ready. Whenever you're ready.

24 MS. CECILIA TEUBER: Hi, good morning. So, I  
25 just want to thank you for first allowing me the

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1 opportunity to speak today at this hearing. My name is  
2 Cecilia Tuber. I use she/her pronouns. I'm a community  
3 organizer at Urban Youth Alliance, also known as Bronx  
4 Connect. My colleague Anthony just spoke a little bit  
5 about kind of where we see the need, and our main location  
6 is in the South Bronx. And so, yes, we identify a lot of  
7 our young people are under-resourced. We really want to  
8 focus on today is just how the reinvestment of the \$1.2  
9 billion annually that we're moving from that will be  
10 allocated to other community-based resources from the  
11 Rikers Island funding is going to be so important and so  
12 helpful to our community members. So, as an employee of  
13 Urban Youth Alliance, also known again as Bronx Connect,  
14 we're seeing firsthand how services such as ATI,  
15 Alternative to Incarceration, and reentry programs really  
16 provide people second chances and necessary resources and  
17 tools to successfully reintegrate back into the community  
18 and meet the person where they are. So, one thing that I  
19 think all of us who are service providers here knows is  
20 that every individual requires different resources and  
21 different--they have different areas and rooms of  
22 improvement and different needs. So, you have to really  
23 look at those individuals as simply that, as that  
24 individual, not as, there's not this one size fits all.  
25 So, what our organization and many that are on this Zoom

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1 today are really advocating for is allocating more of this  
2 funding that right now is going to Rikers Island two more  
3 of these community-based resources that are actually  
4 helping individuals where they're at, rather than throwing  
5 this absurd amount of money into a system that's frankly  
6 harming the individuals that go through it. So, everyone  
7 what we hear also oftentimes is that people are either re-  
8 traumatized being incarcerated at Rikers Island, or if  
9 they enter Rikers and had no prior mental health illness  
10 or issue in the past will actually leave with one, and  
11 that's really problematic. So, we really want to focus  
12 on, again, these programs and these organizations, just  
13 like Bronx Connect, that actually provide services that  
14 help individuals get out of Rikers and stay out, and then  
15 create a pathway by resourcing these individuals to then  
16 lead a successful life that will reduce the rates of  
17 recidivism citywide. So, again, I just want to kind of  
18 see about the \$1.2 billion budget annually for--that goes  
19 into Rikers Island is really a disgrace and a stain as the  
20 city is spending that exorbitant amount of money to a  
21 system that's simply, again, not working. So, what we  
22 want to really do is now move that funding into the  
23 system, into the programs and organizations that actually  
24 understand the individuals that are being detained and  
25 that are being released back into their communities. So,

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1 we want to really do that..

2 MR. PARAISO: Time.

3 MS. TEUBER: Okay. Well, just wanted to say  
4 thank you and to hopefully continue moving this money into  
5 programs like ATIs and reentry programs that are helping  
6 individuals. Thank you.

7 MR. PARAISO: Thank you so much. And there was  
8 a question in the chat box. And thank you so much,  
9 Anthony, for responding to it already. Where is Urban  
10 Youth Alliance located? So, it's located at 432 East  
11 149th Street in the Bronx, and they have other offices.  
12 So, more information in the chat box. And our next person  
13 is Jason. Three minutes.

14 MR. JASON RORIGUEZ: Good morning, chair and  
15 commissioners. I'm Jason Rodriguez, a policy researcher  
16 associate at the Legal Action Center, where we lead the  
17 New York City Alternatives to Incarceration and Reentry  
18 Coalition. I'm also a survivor of Rikers. I've seen and  
19 lived what change happens when care shows up instead of  
20 handcuffs and cages. New York has spent decades choosing  
21 punishment over care. It poured billions of dollars each  
22 year into cages while deprioritizing affordable housing,  
23 quality public schools, access to health care, and  
24 creating sustainable employment opportunities. That  
25 intentional disinvestment, especially in black and brown

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1 neighborhoods, built a landscape with mass incarceration  
2 and criminalization to boot. Rikers didn't fail because  
3 it was mismanaged. It failed because it was designed to  
4 punish people already failed by every other system. The  
5 \$1.2 billion saved should go toward dramatically expanding  
6 the infrastructure that already exists and actually works.  
7 Community-based alternatives that keep people out of jail  
8 and create real pathways to stability; supportive housing,  
9 voluntary treatment, peer support, paid job training, and  
10 pre-trial services should be fully funded. A portion  
11 should also pilot new community-led responses to mental  
12 health and family crisis that don't involve police,  
13 courtrooms, or jails. And these dollars must be  
14 prioritized for neighbors targeted by over-policing and  
15 underfunding with transparent goals and real community  
16 control. Addressing root causes isn't complicated.  
17 People are pushing to survival strategies by eviction,  
18 untreated illness, overpoliced neighborhoods, school  
19 exclusion, and poverty. In New York, that looks like  
20 families being pushed out of neighborhoods by unaffordable  
21 rent, of subway fare climbing--raised to almost \$3 while  
22 wages stay flat, and schools that suspend kids instead of  
23 supporting them, especially in Black and Brown  
24 communities. What can we do, you ask? Guarantee  
25 affordable housing that keeps people in place. Make

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1 transit free or truly low cost. Put fresh food within  
2 reach. These are all baseline conditions for safety, and  
3 entire communities have been denied them for generations.  
4 Repair means returning what was taken and letting the  
5 people harmed decide how to rebuild. That starts with  
6 reentry supports that make sure people have housing,  
7 healthcare, and income when they come home. It means  
8 civil legal help for what stands in the way, no ID,  
9 delayed, denied medical benefits, ceiling of old criminal  
10 records. It means supporting families torn apart by  
11 incarceration with care, stability, and school supports  
12 that support kids learning and out of the system. And it  
13 means creating a community reparative fund governed by  
14 directly impacted residents to restore what was stripped  
15 away: youth spaces, housing, and small businesses. This  
16 crisis was created by design. Repair has to be just as  
17 deliberate. Care creates public safety, something Rikers  
18 has never done. Thank you.

19 MR. PARAISO: Thank you so much. Yes. Is  
20 Frances in the room?

21 DR. GETELES: Yes, I am here.

22 MR. PARAISO: Oh, I'm sorry. Sorry, I  
23 misunderstood. Yes. Whenever--you have that time.  
24 Whenever you're ready, Frances.

25 DR. GETELES: Hi, my name is Dr. Francis

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1           Geteles, and I'm a clinical psychologist. I'm also an  
2           active member of the Jails Action Coalition and the Holt  
3           Solitary Campaign. The issue that I would want to address  
4           is that right now, the population of people incarcerated  
5           at Rikers are more than 50% people with serious mental  
6           health problems. When the mental hospitals were closed  
7           down in the 70s or 80s, the promise was that there will be  
8           community health programs that would be there so that the  
9           people who needed that help could get it. But instead,  
10          what we've done is put a lot of money into prisons and  
11          jails, and as a result, Rikers is the second-largest  
12          mental health hospital in the country. I think there's  
13          only one larger one out in California. And that's just  
14          wrong because that's not the kind of environment in which  
15          people with mental health problems can be genuinely  
16          helped. Very often, in fact, at Board of Corrections  
17          hearings, the staff themselves will say, we're not social  
18          workers. We can't help. So, of course, the answer that  
19          we keep hearing and we hear sometimes from politicians is  
20          that they need to be put back into the hospitals, but  
21          that's a terrible idea. Right now, New York State has a  
22          bill on the agenda to create community clubhouses where  
23          people can go and get the kind of help they need on a  
24          voluntary basis. You send someone to a therapist, and you  
25          insist that they go, they have no reason to trust those

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1 people. But if they go to the clubhouses and meet some of  
2 the staff, trust might be able to be built up. So, I  
3 believe we should be spending the money, or a good part of  
4 the money, on developing community-based programs for the  
5 mentally ill and stop putting them in jail. Thank you  
6 very much.

7 MR. PARAISO: Thank you so much, Doctor, and  
8 apologies for the oversight. Thank you. So, I'm going to  
9 paste the next five people. I know Malori is running  
10 behind. She sent me an email. So, Michael, I feel like I  
11 saw you, Michael. So, Michael, whenever you're ready.  
12 Michael Collins? Oh, and the next person is Rickie. I  
13 see your hand up, so whenever you're ready.

14 MR. RICKIE T. JAMES: Good, I thought they said  
15 that. Hello, my name is Mr. Rickie T. James. I'm a  
16 member of the Park Slope Civic Council. I'm also a member  
17 of the American Institution of Architecture in Brooklyn.  
18 The issue today is Rikers Island. In Brooklyn, the  
19 detention house on Atlantic Avenue has been taken down.  
20 There's no longer any sight or sound from about that  
21 detention center. As a youth and in my 20s, I was afraid  
22 to drive down J Street or Atlantic Avenue, where it was  
23 sitting. It was too violent. It was too violent. I had  
24 to stoop so low, I went out with one of the guards at the  
25 detention center, Camille, and we gave insight to the

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1 people that went inside that jail detention home. I had a  
2 lot of friends and lot a family who went into the  
3 detention home, and Camille did take care of them. A  
4 suggestion for the money that we are receiving for Rikers  
5 Island to go to more women and more minorities hired for  
6 that feasible study with Rikers Island. Again, we are  
7 building up, we're not building out. Thank you very much.

8 MR. PARAIISO: Thank you so much. David, are you  
9 in the room? And Henry? Yes. So, I see your hand up,  
10 Michael. So, whenever you're ready.

11 MR. MICHAEL COLLINS: Yeah, I didn't know  
12 previously that I was actually scheduled to speak, but,  
13 yes, I agree with so many viewpoints about the  
14 reinvestment into the community. I myself, I also work  
15 for the organization Bronx Connect, and as Anthony and  
16 Cecilia earlier said, what the organization does. But I  
17 also previously worked in the mental health psychiatric  
18 field, and it seems like resources have not been put back  
19 into mental health, into our communities, but not only  
20 into our inner city, city communities, but the younger  
21 generation with mental health issues. We have a large  
22 percentage of young people with mental health illnesses  
23 here in New York. A lot of them are in programs like  
24 ours, which is Bronx Connect, and we try to help them with  
25 their needs, but we don't have resources to help with

1 psychiatric-type illnesses that people are undergoing  
2 through while they're going through their financial  
3 struggles. So, what I would like to say is that with some  
4 of the funds from the closure of Rikers, it needs to be  
5 reinvested in our youth because that's where you have to  
6 catch people early in order for them to get ahead of their  
7 crisis. Once they get to the ages of 15, 16, 17, and  
8 they're into the juvenile justice system and the streets,  
9 it's harder to help them because they've fallen behind in  
10 education and everything else. So, I think we need to  
11 spend more money in youth as they're growing to teach them  
12 before they hit the streets and they hit the problems of  
13 difficulty with the law. I just hope that there would be  
14 ways that some of those monies can be reinvested in  
15 catching people early. Even with simple things such as  
16 training young females about childcare, what it takes, get  
17 them early so that we don't have problems with mental  
18 health and people as they get older. Thank you very much.

19 MR. PARAISO: Thank you so much, Michael. So,  
20 before I go over the list again, is there anyone in the  
21 room who would like to speak but did not sign up? Please  
22 raise your hand. Daniele, whenever.

23 MR. DANIELE GERARD: I'm sorry. I did sign up,  
24 but I'm not quite sure what happened. But in any event,  
25 thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name

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1 is Daniele Gerard. I'm a senior staff attorney at  
2 Children's Rights. We are a national organization that  
3 advocates on behalf of youth and state systems, and here  
4 in the city, we advocate on behalf of young adults on  
5 Rikers. We cannot incarcerate our way to public safety.  
6 We have got to invest in our communities, and that's why  
7 the work you're doing is so important. We shouldn't  
8 continue to throw money at the humanitarian disaster  
9 that's Rikers Island when people continue to die in  
10 custody, several more so far this year. We urge this  
11 committee to use every lever it has to redistribute the  
12 money saved from closing Rikers and be reinvested in  
13 communities to actually improve public safety. We were  
14 saying during the budget hearings that if the city  
15 eliminated the more than 1100 current vacant positions for  
16 uniformed correction officers, New York City could save  
17 almost \$150 million alone to reinvest in programs and  
18 services. This savings would also help the city work  
19 toward closing Rikers in August of 2027, which is only two  
20 years from now. We would urge the committee to continue  
21 to call on the City Council and the administration to  
22 ensure our communities have adequate, supportive, and  
23 affordable housing and mental health services before New  
24 Yorkers interact with the criminal legal system. This is  
25 particularly critical for our children and youth.

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1 Evidence shows that incarceration reduces youth success in  
2 education and employment, leads to lasting damage to their  
3 health and well-being, and alternatives to incarceration  
4 lead to better outcomes for them, all while costing far  
5 less than incarceration. Underfunding alternatives to  
6 confinement and punitive services makes no sense morally,  
7 ethically, or fiscally. Especially in the face of the  
8 federal government's rampage against the most vulnerable  
9 among us, we look to you all to help in demanding that our  
10 elected officials do right by all New Yorkers. Nothing  
11 that I've said here today is news to any of you, and we're  
12 really grateful for your work and just want you to know  
13 that we support you 100%, and I also echo all of the  
14 comments that my fellow advocates have made, and thank you  
15 again for the opportunity to testify today.

16 MR. PARAISO: Thank you so much. And Malori,  
17 whenever you're ready, and thank you so much for joining  
18 us. I know transportation is a challenge.

19 MS. MALORI MALONEY: Thank you. I appreciate  
20 your accommodation. My name is Malori Maloney, and I'm  
21 currently a managing attorney at the Incarcerated Client  
22 Services Unit at the Legal Aid Society. I thank you for  
23 the opportunity to testify today. The Legal Aid Society  
24 is the nation's oldest and largest public non-profit legal  
25 service agency providing public defense and civil legal

1 services in all five boroughs of New York City. For  
2 generations, Legal Aid clients have suffered endemic  
3 violence in decrepit, isolated, draconian jails at Rikers  
4 Island. As a result, Rikers Island has inflicted  
5 devastating and irreparable consequences upon generations  
6 of black, brown, and Latinx people on indigenous  
7 communities, on immigrant communities, on low-income and  
8 working-class individuals, on people with disabilities, on  
9 LGBTQ+ people, and on others who have been historically  
10 marginalized. At a preliminary level, a shift away from  
11 funding incarceration should be rooted in moving away from  
12 the overuse of carceral settings by providing increased  
13 funding to alternatives to incarceration and detention,  
14 supervised relief services, discharge planning services,  
15 community health and mental health services, and  
16 meaningful access to housing. There must be increased  
17 investments in neighborhood-based programs that improve  
18 public safety and reduce violence, and a focus on  
19 redressing failed public policies that are reflected in  
20 the inequities across the city in areas such as education,  
21 policing, and technology. Going forward, the city must  
22 reallocate the funds used for mass incarceration and make  
23 direct capital investments in communities that have  
24 endured the brunt of the systemic harm. Investments must  
25 be made in conjunction with community needs through a

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1 transparent public process, a process that will allow  
2 impacted communities to self-identify their needs in an  
3 attempt to begin to heal the harms of mass incarceration  
4 in New York City. While resource communities are safe and  
5 thriving communities, thank you for your time and  
6 consideration of this testimony.

7 MR. PARAISO: Thank you so much. And before I  
8 go to commission member Evelyn Graham, I know Jeffrey, you  
9 also signed up online; whenever you're ready. Jimenez?

10 MR. PARAISO: We're all here to hear your  
11 testimony. Evelyn, did you have a comment or testimony to  
12 deliver? You are muted.

13 MS. EVELYN GRAHAM-NYASSI: Yeah, I just wanted  
14 to make a comment, that's all. Do you want me to say it  
15 now?

16 MR. PARAISO: Sure. So, you'll have three  
17 minutes to make your comment.

18 MS. GRAHAM-NYASSI: Well, I don't--it won't be  
19 three minutes long, but I agree with what everyone has  
20 said so far. I feel as if they--people who are being  
21 discharged from Rikers and also the money should be spent  
22 making sure that they're okay. For instance, having peers  
23 inside with them before they go out, providing them with  
24 housing, wraparound services, and, yeah. Excellent  
25 discharge and wraparound services. And they should be

1 discharged to housing, not to shelters. We need to make  
2 sure that they have their medication because a lot of  
3 people today who are released from prison or Rikers, they  
4 don't have their medication, and there's no way for them  
5 to get it, and I don't believe that the shelters are  
6 equipped to give them medications. So, I think that we  
7 should really consider that when we're allotting money to  
8 different agencies. I also believe that there should be  
9 training, real training, so that they can have real living  
10 wages and not just something that's not paying a lot of  
11 money. And also, they need places to go when they come  
12 out, where they'll feel like they're a part of something,  
13 and that would be, for me, would be the clubhouses. So,  
14 thank you.

15 MR. PARISO: Thank you so much. So, is there  
16 anyone else in the room who would like to deliver  
17 testimony? If so, please raise your hand. I do not see  
18 anyone. The hearing room will remain open until 11:30  
19 a.m. today. You're more than welcome to stay in the room  
20 until 11:30, but just wanted to share a few reminders. If  
21 you're interested in--please remember that written  
22 testimony must be submitted at midnight today, August 26.  
23 Comments can be emailed to [reinvestment@dss.nyc.gov](mailto:reinvestment@dss.nyc.gov).  
24 Transcript of today's hearing and written testimonies will  
25 be posted on HRA's website in a couple of weeks. If you

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1 would like to be notified about the next hearing, please  
2 also send an email to reinvestment at dss.nyc.gov or go to  
3 the Commission website landing page and sign up for our  
4 mailing list. So, I will drop both the email address as  
5 well as the link to our landing page in the chat box.  
6 Once again, the room will remain open until 11:30 a.m.  
7 You folks are more than welcome to stay in the room with  
8 us. But otherwise, thank you so much for your time.

9 MANY: Thank you.

10 MR. PARAISO: Good morning. Thank you so much  
11 for joining us for today's hearing. If you have just  
12 joined us and if you would like to testify, please raise  
13 your hand or press \*9 if you're calling in on your phone.  
14 If you need translation assistance, also please let us  
15 know.

16 (Silence)

17 MR. COLLINS: Logging off, everyone. Have a  
18 wonderful day.

19 MR. PARAISO: Thank you, Michael, for joining  
20 us.

21 (Silence)

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 star nine if you're calling in by phone.  
25 If you need translation assistance, please also let us

1 know. The room will remain open until 11:30 a.m. Thank  
2 you so much.

3 (Silence)

4 MR. PARAIISO: Good morning. If you have just  
5 joined us and wish to testify, please raise your hand in  
6 the chat or press star nine if you're calling in by phone.  
7 If you need translation assistance, please also let us  
8 know. The room will remain open until 11:30 a.m. Thank  
9 you.

10 (Silence)

11 MR. PARAIISO: Good morning, it's 11:15. If you  
12 have just joined us and wish to testify, please raise your  
13 hand in the chat or press star nine if you're calling in  
14 by phone. If you need translation assistance, please also  
15 let us know. The room will remain open until 11:30 for  
16 testimony. Thank you so much.

17 (Silence)

18 MR. PARAIISO: Good morning. It is 11:25 a.m.  
19 The hearing room will remain open until 11:30. If you  
20 wish to deliver testimony, please raise your hand in the  
21 chat or press star nine if you're calling by phone. Thank  
22 you.

23 (Silence)

24 MR. PARAIISO: Good morning. It's 11:28. If you  
25 are just joining us and wish to deliver testimony, please

1 raise your hand or press \*9 if you're calling in by phone.  
2 Thank you again for coming today and sharing your  
3 comments. Please remember that written testimony must be  
4 submitted at midnight today, August 26. Comments can be  
5 emailed to reinvestment at dss.nyc.gov. A transcript of  
6 today's hearing and written testimony will be posted on  
7 HRA's website on the Commission on Community Reinvestment  
8 landing page. If you would like to be notified about the  
9 next hearing, please send an email to  
10 reinvestment@dss.nyc.gov or go to the commission website  
11 and sign up for our mailing list. So, I'm going to drop  
12 the links in the chat box again really quickly for people.  
13 So, the first link is to our landing page. This second  
14 link is to our mailing list. It's 11:30 a.m. This  
15 concludes the public hearing. Once again, thank you so  
16 much for joining us, and I look forward to our continued  
17 partnership. Enjoy the rest of your day. Bye. Thank  
18 you. Thank you. Have a good day, everyone.

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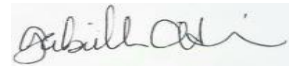
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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



09/02/2025