

**New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice  
Hearing On Reducing Violence Among Young People in New York City Jails  
Testimony of Jared M. Trujillo, Esq., Policy Counsel**

**March 28, 2022**

Good afternoon. My name is Jared Trujillo, and I serve as Policy Counsel at the New York Civil Liberties Union. Thank you Chair Rivera and members of the Criminal Justice Committee for holding this hearing, and for the opportunity to testify. This hearing is both timely and crucial, as the Department of Corrections continues to violate the constitutional rights of incarcerated New Yorkers by allowing Rikers to maintain unprecedented levels of staff abuse, medical neglect, and violence. Young people in carceral facilities are particularly vulnerable to these abuses. At Rikers, youth people are housed at the Robert N. Davoren Complex (“RNDC”), which has been particularly vulnerable to incidences of violence, abuse



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According to the Thirteenth Report of the Nunez Federal Monitor issued March 16, 2022, the rate of violence at Rikers is seven to eight times higher than it is at jails in other jurisdictions. Concerningly, there is no sign that conditions at Rikers are improving. The Monitor notes that “the Department [of Corrections] poor practices regarding the use of force and its level of violence caused concern for the Monitoring Team at the inception of the Consent Judgment, and the Monitoring Team’s level of alarm has only increased over time as these rates continued to climb.” The report notes that many instances of use of force were “completely preventable,” the use of force has increased each year, with the use of force was the highest it has ever been in 2021. Young people are housed at the Robert N. Davoren Complex (“RNDC”), which the report notes has been plagued by particularly high levels of violence and staff abuse.

Rampant absenteeism and neglect from corrections officers and other staff perpetuates violence among incarcerated people. According to the Federal Monitor’s report, approximately one-third of corrections officers refuse to work. Young incarcerated people frequently tell their public defenders that they are not provided meals due to a lack of staff, and the Federal Monitor’s report notes that medical appointments for incarcerated people are either delayed or missed completely. The people incarcerated at Rikers were so desperate to be treated humanely that several went on a hunger-strike earlier this year. This desperation, inadequate treatment, and neglect from corrections officers that refuse to work all contribute to a culture of violence at Rikers, which includes violence among incarcerated people. The Federal Monitor’s report notes that “these high rates [of violence] are not typical, they are not expected, they are not normal.”

Rikers is not only violent, but it is deadly. 16 people died at Rikers last year, which was the deadliest year at the jail since 2013, despite the daily census at Rikers being significantly lower in 2021. Thus far, 3 people have died at Rikers in 2022.

The most effective way to reduce violence for young people at Rikers is to reduce the number of young people at Rikers. In spite of federal oversight for more than half of a

decade, conditions at Rikers have only declined. The city must meaningfully invest in evidence-based solutions that curb violence, and heal traumatized survivors of violence so that they do not become perpetrators of violence. Violence interrupters and credible messengers, such as those in the Save Our Streets program in Crown Heights, work with young people to prevent retaliation for violent incidents, thereby stopping cycles of violence. Investing in violence interrupters, services for survivors, adequate education, housing, and youth employment would do far more to prevent youth violence than the cramming more young people into one of the most dangerous jails in the United States.

For those youth at Rikers, it is imperative to remediate the deplorable conditions at the jail. There must be accountability for abusive corrections officers. According to the Federal Monitor's report, only two staff members were suspended for use of force related misconduct in the first two months of 2022, despite rampant use of force among staff, especially against young people. The Department of Corrections must immediately ensure young people have access to education, medical care, and programming. Additionally, DOC must provide restorative justice programming to resolve conflicts, and to prevent future conflicts from occurring. New York should adopt models like San Francisco's Resolve to Stop the Violence Project (R.S.V.P.), which are proven to reduce jail violence and recidivism.

Notably, jail violence can spill out into the community. Reducing youth violence at Rikers through decarceration and improving conditions at Rikers is a public safety imperative.



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