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## **POLICY PLATFORM**

### **I. PROVIDE SAFETY FOR INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS RELEASED DURING COVID-19.**

#### **PROVIDE IDENTIFICATION UPON RELEASE**

Service providers report that individuals are being released from Rikers Island without their personal belongings, including IDs; and many people lack valid identification to begin with. ID cards are critical for accessing housing and public benefits, and the lack of these documents can lead to further police abuse.

An executive order by Mayor Bill de Blasio or the Human Resources Administration (HRA) Commissioner Steve Banks, followed by interagency collaboration, could ensure that every person released from Rikers Island is equipped with IDNYC, Mayor de Blasio's signature municipal identification card program.

#### **EFFECTIVELY TRANSITION PEOPLE'S HEALTHCARE FROM RIKERS TO THEIR COMMUNITY**

Individuals often are released from Rikers Island and other City jails without immediate access to health insurance or sufficient medication. Many service providers are unable to quickly access health records, rendering them unable to meet clients' needs, particularly for those who struggle with mental health issues and substance abuse.

The Mayor should ensure that the Department of Correction (DOC) and Correctional Health Services (CHS) guarantee continuity of care between correctional and community settings, working with reentry service providers. In addition, New York State should resubmit a request to the federal government so that Medicaid can be "turned on" prior to release from jail or prison. The New York State Department of Health (DOH) submitted but then withdrew a waiver request during the Trump administration requesting permission to activate Medicaid for those who are incarcerated 30 days prior to discharge from prisons and for a 30-day period as needed in jails. This request should be resubmitted.

#### **PROVIDE EVERY INDIVIDUAL WITH COVID-19 TESTING AND VACCINE ACCESS**

The COVID-19 infection rate on Rikers Island has been several times higher than that of the whole of New York City. Like those living in other congregate settings, New Yorkers in our jails are at extraordinarily high risk for infection from the virus because conditions do not allow for physical distancing. Additionally, the correctional staff go home to their families and communities, increasing the risk of spread.

Incarcerated New Yorkers and the staff who work with them should be prioritized for access to the vaccine. To address the historical and legitimate mistrust between those in jail and their in-custody medical providers, this should include comprehensive public health education by trusted entities such as reentry and community health care providers on the "inside." Optimally, these trusted partners will also physically administer the vaccine, rather than existing jail staff. People

in jail should also be guaranteed COVID-19 testing as part of the discharge process so they can protect their families and communities when they return home.

Distributing tests and vaccines, as well as ensuring that those who are incarcerated are provided with accurate and complete information about the vaccine will require cooperation of City agencies and leadership from Mayor de Blasio.

## **II. UNLOCK HOUSING SUPPLY FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS AND THEIR FAMILIES.**

### **END NYCHA PERMANENT EXCLUSIONS**

The New York City Housing Authority, like many private landlords, discriminates against New Yorkers who have been involved with the criminal legal system. The administration of NYCHA, on behalf of the City of New York, has the power to deem NYCHA residents as “dangerous” and “undesirable,” leading to their permanent exclusion from their homes and to separation from their family members. Though NYCHA made improvements to its criminal justice policies in April 2021, NYCHA Permanent Exclusions still go beyond federal requirements by broadly removing individuals with any kind of criminal record and even residents who have been arrested and not convicted of a crime. By being evicted from their homes and separated from their families, this policy makes NYCHA residents homeless and creates the conditions for recidivism.

To ensure that justice-involved New Yorkers can stay in their homes, with their families, NYCHA should revise its guidance and stop prohibiting housing to individuals with any criminal record. Ending NYCHA Permanent Exclusion will take leadership from Greg Russ, the chair of the public housing authority.

### **INSTITUTIONALIZE NYCHA FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROGRAM**

NYCHA knows what it takes to break the cycle of incarceration to homelessness and recidivism. The NYCHA Family Reunification Program launched in 2013 as a pilot for individuals who are transitioning from jail and prison to connect them with support services related to education and employment. Since then, the program has successfully reunited over 100 families and serves as a source of critical information for justice-involved families as they navigate the transition. A 2017 study by the Vera Institute showed that 68% of program participants were reunited with at least one parent and 15% were reunited with their children. Nearly half of those surveyed said that they would be forced onto the streets, shelters, or three-quarters housing were it not for the program.

Currently this program is only supported by two staff across all NYCHA housing developments. It is time for this program to become an expanded, permanent fixture of the reentry system in NYCHA and support the reunification of families. The program has garnered unprecedented success and if it is brought to scale, it could reduce our growing homeless population. Vicki Been, the Deputy Mayor of Housing and Economic Development, should ensure that the NYCHA Family Reunification Program is scaled to be a permanent unit, and the City Council must allocate funding to expand service provision.

### **EXPAND WHO QUALIFIES FOR FEDERALLY FUNDED SUPPORTIVE HOUSING**

Individuals who are jailed for 90+ days do not meet the federal government’s definition for chronic homelessness, excluding them from federally funded supportive housing. Legislation from

Congress and a new rule from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) would revise the criteria to expand housing opportunities for those who need support services.

The Mayor's Office of Intergovernmental Affairs (MOIGA), led by Lydon Sleeper, can make this a priority for the City in Washington, D.C.

### **COMBAT LANDLORD DISCRIMINATION AGAINST NEW YORKERS WITH CRIMINAL RECORDS**

Our neighbors who have been involved in the legal system have a notoriously difficult time accessing stable housing. In New York City, landlords are legally allowed to discriminate against people who have an arrest or conviction record and deny them housing. The City Council should pass the Fair Chance for Housing Act ([Intro 2047](#)) and make it illegal for landlords to discriminate against New Yorkers with legal system involvement.

### **ALLOCATE A PORTION OF CITY-FINANCED HOUSING TO JUSTICE-INVOLVED NEW YORKERS**

The NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) finances the development of affordable housing projects across the city, including on public land. HPD often sets aside a portion of the available housing units for certain populations like those residing in the local community, city employees, and New Yorkers with disabilities. The agency can similarly set aside a portion of affordable housing units for families with justice-involved members.

Mayor Bill de Blasio, Deputy Mayor Vicki Been, HPD Commissioner Louise Carroll, and Housing Development Corporation (HDC) Commissioner Eric Enderlin should act from the executive side. Robert Cornegy, Chair of the Committee on Housing and Buildings, can hold the administration accountable and support through legislation.

### **CREATE NEW JUSTICE-INVOLVED SUPPORTIVE AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING**

The Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ) has successfully provided emergency housing for New Yorkers released from jails during the COVID-19 pandemic by master-leasing hotels across the city. Hotel residents have benefited from services provided by New Yorkers who are themselves BIPOC and directly affected by the justice system. These hotels are separate and apart from other hotels that temporarily housed New Yorkers experiencing homelessness during the pandemic, not specific to the reentry community. The City must now ensure the availability of such transitional housing long term and provide pathways to permanent housing for these individuals.

The Mayor and City Council should double the number of transitional housing beds from 500 to 1,000, which would require a budget increase from \$25 million to \$50 million. Leasing hotels may be a worthwhile investment in the short term, but long term the City should expand the supply through programs to acquire and convert hotels to supportive and deeply affordable housing. In doing so, the City should ensure that these programs move people on a continuum from transitional to permanent housing, with or without services depending on individual need.

Mayor Bill de Blasio, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ), Deputy Mayor Vicki Been, and commissioners for housing, health, and social services must act from the executive side. In addition to City Council Speaker Corey Johnson, members such as Stephen Levin, Brad Lander, and Vanessa Gibson, Daniel Dromm have been vocal on the relevant issues.

### **III. DEVELOP A COORDINATED REENTRY SYSTEM ACCOUNTABLE TO THE WELL-BEING OF EACH PERSON.**

No single City agency or individual has oversight of reentry services nor is held accountable for the outcomes of individuals once released from jail. By working in close collaboration with justice-involved individuals, advocates, and experts, the mayor can use his authority to create a unified reentry system that coordinates the actions and policies of the Department of Correction (DOC), Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ), Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), Department of Social Services (DSS), and Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). The City Council can codify changes into law to outlast this administration.

#### **STRENGTHEN LOCAL LAW 103 TO INCREASE AUTHORITY AND COORDINATION**

One way this can be achieved is by strengthening [Local Law 103 of 2016](#) which mandates that the mayor establish a Municipal Division of Transitional Services and appoint a coordinator to lead it. While the law calls for the division to create a coordinated reentry system, it does not give the division the authority to mandate policy and program changes by other agencies. The requirements of the law are currently being carried out by MOCJ.

The mayor should work with the City Council, justice-involved New Yorkers, advocates, and service providers to amend the law to ensure that the coordinator is a high-level position reporting directly to the mayor or a deputy mayor and the division has the authority and accountability necessary to mandate needed changes.

#### **CONSOLIDATE SERVICE PROVIDER CONTRACTS**

Currently DOC manages contracts with nonprofit organizations to provide services in city jails and MOCJ manages separate contracts for reentry services. Because there is overlap between services and providers in these contracts, the City should consolidate them to improve coordination and avoid duplication, as well as ensure the use of best practices across providers. These contracts should be managed by the entity overseen by the high-level coordinator described above.

Additionally, this should include integrating, expanding and funding the Health Justice Network, which is overseen by DOHMH and provides comprehensive reentry services through partnerships between reentry and health care providers. It is staffed by community health workers who have lived experience with the criminal justice system and serve as navigators and mentors. Evaluation of the program is underway and interim results look promising. The program is currently funded through the Manhattan District Attorney through February 2022. The mayor and the City Council should work to baseline this funding in the city budget.

#### **INCREASE CAPACITY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICE AGENCIES TO SERVE JUSTICE-INVOLVED NEW YORKERS**

New York City is home to a plethora of health and human service agencies. However, only a small number of these organizations have the expertise, experience and funding to effectively work with those with justice system involvement. The City should partner with and fund a wide range of organizations to increase their capacity to work with and support these New Yorkers.