

**Testimony of
Bea de la Torre
On behalf of
Trinity Church Wall Street and Faith Communities for Just Reentry
Before
The Council of the City of New York
Committees on Criminal Justice, the Justice System, General Welfare,
Public Housing, and Housing and Buildings
October 21, 2020**

1. Trinity Church Wall Street & Faith Communities for Just Reentry

My name is Bea de la Torre, and I am the Managing Director of Housing & Homelessness at Trinity Church Wall Street.

Trinity Church is [committed](#) to breaking the cycle of mass incarceration and mass homelessness that impacts nearly 20,000 New Yorkers each year. We are conveners of Faith Communities for Just Reentry (FCJR), an interfaith coalition of more than 40 faith leaders across the five boroughs. Together, we are calling upon Mayor de Blasio and the City Council to create a just reentry system. This means providing for the safety of New Yorkers released from the city's jails during the COVID-19 crisis, stable housing for justice-involved individuals and their families, and coordinated support services that are held accountable to the well-being of each person.

2. The Crisis of the Status Quo

I want to take a moment to describe who is failed by the status quo:

- Half of the city's jail population (53%) was Black and a third (34%) Latinx last year, perpetuating systemic racism.
- Four in every five women on Rikers Island are mothers who cannot find housing for their families;
- And for every unit of supportive housing, there are 4-5 approved applicants ready to move in.

These are our fellow New Yorkers. Without reform, the City forces these families into homelessness.

3. Needed Housing & Reentry Reforms

We call upon Mayor de Blasio and the City Council to make immediate changes to unlock housing supply for justice-involved New Yorkers and their families.

1. Increase Access to the Existing Supply of Housing

We strongly support two pieces of legislation before the Council. We support Int 146, to raise the value of CityFHEPS vouchers to fair market value, so that families can actually use these vouchers to avoid homelessness. We also support Int 2047, the Fair Chance for Housing Act, which would prohibit private landlords from discriminating against New Yorkers with criminal records. We thank Council Member Levin for introducing these bills and commend the NYC Commission on Human Rights for committing to vigorously enforce these protections.

2. Reform NYCHA Policies and Programs

Ending discrimination in the private market is not enough, however. The largest landlord in the city is our own public housing authority. If just one member of a household is arrested—*not even convicted*—NYCHA can begin termination of tenancy proceedings against an entire family. NYCHA should also expand its Family Reunification Program, which connects reentering New Yorkers to social services. We ask that every member of this body submit comments to NYCHA before October 28 to demand access for all New Yorkers.

3. Identification for Safe Reentry During and After COVID-19

The City Council should pass legislation to require the Department of Correction (DOC) and the Human Resources Administration (HRA) to issue an IDNYC card to every New Yorker discharged from jails. An ID card means access to medication, to jobs, and yes, to housing.

4. Closing

Faith Communities for Just Reentry redoubles its call for Mayor de Blasio, Speaker Johnson, and the entire City Council to develop a coordinated reentry system that can be held accountable to the well-being and whole dignity of each person. It is the just and moral thing to do.

Thank you again to all of you for your leadership.