

TRINITY CHURCH WALL STREET

03.23.22 - Trinity Church Testimony - Criminal Justice Committee - FY23 Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 23, 2022 | **Subject:** FY23 Preliminary Budget Testimony

Dear Speaker Adams and Members of the Committee on Criminal Justice:

My name is Susan Shah, Managing Director of Racial Justice at Trinity Church Wall Street. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for this Fiscal Year 2023 budget hearing. We urge the Mayor and City Council to prioritize investments in services and support for justice-involved New Yorkers to support their re-entry into society, reduce incarceration and homelessness, and make our city safer.

Trinity Church Wall Street is an Episcopal Church in Lower Manhattan with a congregation of more than 1,600 parishioners, who come from all five boroughs and form an ethnically, racially, and economically diverse congregation. In addition to our ministry, we carry out the mission of faith and social justice through direct services, grantmaking, and advocacy.

Trinity has a long history of advancing social justice in alignment with our belief that every person is created in the image of God and has dignity and value. Trinity has a particular focus on strengthening the well-being of young people, families and our community, particularly as our city strives for an equitable recovery, recognizing that those hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout are Black and brown New Yorkers.

In this context and as faith leaders and fellow New Yorkers, we continue to be deeply troubled by the appalling conditions throughout New York City's jails and the impact that they have on the well-being of those detained and those who work in them. For generations, the City's jails have been plagued with abuse, inhumane conditions, and violence, failing to make New York City safer.

This humanitarian crisis requires our elected leaders to transform New York City's justice system into one that recognizes the humanity and dignity of all individuals and improves public safety. To achieve these goals, we urge the Mayor and the Council to invest in the following initiatives in Fiscal Year 2023 and beyond:

- 1. Protect full funding for and stick to the mandated timeframe of the plan to close Rikers Island by 2027 and build smaller and more humane borough-based jails.** We urge the Mayor and the City Council to enact and financially support the recommendations made by the [Commission on Community Reinvestment](#) and the Closure of Rikers Island, established by Local Law 19334, and ensure that funding for the Commission is baselined into the City budget until Rikers is fully closed. We also call on the Mayor to prioritize policy and practice reforms that will safely reduce the jail population, including but not limited to the investments noted below, and facilitate prompt construction of the four borough-based jails.

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2. **Increase capacity of Alternative to Incarceration programs.** Increase funding—and, in turn, capacity—for alternatives to incarceration (ATI) to enable the city to sufficiently reduce the jail population on Rikers Island. Currently, 24 ATI programs serve 7,300 New Yorkers at a cost of \$45.8 million, including discretionary funding from the Council. For many people, ATIs deliver safety more effectively than jail and at a fraction of the cost. Half of the nearly 6,000 people on Rikers Island have a mental health diagnosis; at a minimum, the city should divert them into ATIs.
3. **Appoint and empower a high-level City Hall staff person to oversee reentry services and fulfill the requirements of Local Law 103 of 2016.** Despite the mandate of LL 103 which requires the City to establish a municipal division of transitional services and the Mayor to appoint a coordinator, there is no single City agency or individual responsible nor held accountable for the outcomes of individuals once they are released from incarceration. A senior position reporting directly to the Mayor, First Deputy Mayor or a Deputy Mayor should be created or housed within the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ). This staff person should be able to develop, recommend, and implement policy changes across relevant City agencies including MOCJ and the Departments of Correction, Probation, Health and Mental Hygiene, Social Services, and Housing Preservation and Development. They also would work in close collaboration with reentry and diversion/ATI service providers, advocates, those with lived experience with the criminal justice system, and researchers to create and oversee a unified and comprehensive reentry system that addresses housing, health and mental health care, and employment needs.
4. **Devote more funding to expand services for those struggling with mental health challenges to avoid criminal legal system involvement.** Outpatient mental health treatment, respite care, alternatives to incarceration, and additional secure hospital-based wards are needed to address the interconnected issues of mental health and incarceration. The City has proposed creating three new secure hospital-based wards with a total capacity of 394 beds by 2023. These would serve people with mental illness facing violent felony charges or those who the courts and physicians have determined cannot live safely in the community. However, data suggests that as many as 1,000 beds, spread across multiple hospitals, are necessary to meet the need. These hospital beds should be operated by Health + Hospitals, not the Department of Correction.
5. **Increase and improve the City's supportive housing stock for New Yorkers unable to live in traditional housing by allocating:**
 - a. [\\$57.8 million in expense funding for supportive housing](#) for people who cycle in and out of the City's jail system (\$12.8 million for Justice-Involved Supportive Housing and \$45 million to support rental subsidy increases and higher service rates for supportive housing)
 - b. **\$152 million** for the development, preservation, and rehabilitation of congregate supportive housing units

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- c. **\$46 million** in additional funding to increase the capacity of MOCJ-contracted emergency hotels, which serve people released from City jails and ensure seamless transitions into permanent or supportive housing options

6. **Expand access to the Supervised Release Program by allocating an additional \$62 million.** This pretrial supervision program provides justice-involved individuals with the opportunity to access services while awaiting their trial instead of being detained in City jails, thereby providing an effective tool to reduce the City's total jail population. This increase in funding (in addition to the current \$67 million budget) would support a "high intensity" track for individuals with higher needs and charges than what the program was originally designed to support.

Thank you for providing Trinity with the opportunity to submit testimony.