



There's a crisis at Rikers. **We must #CutShutInvestNY**

New Yorkers are deeply concerned about the crisis on Rikers Island.

The conditions at New York City's massive jail complex are horrific and life-threatening for human beings—the people incarcerated and those who work there.¹ Violence is rampant.² Racism and other types of bias are deeply entrenched.³ And although Black and Latinx people constitute about 53% of the city's population, they represent almost 90% of jail admissions.⁴

Rikers has become the city's largest mental health facility: More than 40% of those incarcerated there have been diagnosed with a mental health condition but have little or no access to meaningful care while they are locked up.⁵ Conditions have worsened during COVID; in December 2021, during the early phase of the Omicron surge, more than 21% of the people detained at Rikers had tested positive for COVID.⁶

Most people on Rikers Island haven't been convicted: they're being held in jail pretrial while considered legally innocent because, unlike those who have money, they can't afford bail.

The situation at Rikers has been deteriorating for many, many years. A 2021 report by a federally appointed monitor found that conditions at Rikers have “progressively and substantially worsened.”⁷ Tragically, 2021 was one of the deadliest years on record for the city's jails: 16 men died in custody.⁸ In March 2022, the federal monitor issued a new report, finding that “the first few months of 2022 have revealed the jails remain unstable and unsafe” for people detained at Rikers and for staff.⁹

Rikers is a catastrophe. Rikers must be shut down.

In 2017, under pressure by community groups and other advocates who organized for many years, Bill de Blasio, then mayor, announced Rikers' closure as official New York City policy. It took until 2019 for the city council to pass a package of related bills. Progress toward shuttering the jail complex has been dismally slow and impeded again and again.¹⁰ While a candidate, Eric Adams stated his commitment to closing Rikers, but as mayor he has yet to issue any plan. And rather than getting behind proven approaches that keep our communities safe without relying on incarceration, *Adams is calling for more people to be put in cages.*

New York City's jail population is going up when it should be going down.

As of April 8, 2022, nearly 5,500 people were incarcerated in city jails, significantly more than two years earlier, when the jail population ranged from 3,869 to 4,630 in March through August 2020.¹¹ That reality undermines the city's commitment to decarceration and could prevent Rikers' closure. In fiscal year 2021, the Department of Correction budget cost the city's taxpayers \$1.25 billion; the cost of incarceration here is \$556,539 a person per year, which is \$1,525 *a day*.¹² That astronomical amount of money could be used instead to make us all safer, by investing in housing, health care, education, and jobs.

New Yorkers are calling on the mayor, other city officials, judges, and district attorneys to #CutShutInvestNY:

■ **CUT the number of people held on Rikers.** Judges and DAs must stop sending people to Rikers, and Mayor Eric Adams must use his authority to decarcerate. Government officials must cut the budgets used for caging people—the budget for the NYPD, for the Department of Correction, and the budgets of the city's five district attorneys.

■ **SHUT down the Rikers Island jail complex.**

■ **INVEST in real community safety:** housing, health care, education, and jobs.

With a growing crisis and a record number of deaths on Rikers last year, we need urgent action. The appalling problems there aren't new. They are all too familiar and only underscore that Rikers must be shut down.

The call to #CutShutInvestNY aligns with the national movement for racial justice—and for reforming the country's criminal legal systems and reducing the number of people incarcerated. By cutting correctional budgets and shutting the Rikers Island jail complex, the city can invest billions in real safety.

Now is the time to close Rikers and advance racial justice in New York City and statewide.

For the references in this factsheet, visit katalcenter.org

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