



CLOSE RIKERS NOW

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 though Black and Latinx people constitute about half of the city's population, they represent almost 90 percent of jail admissions.⁴

Most people on Rikers Island haven't been convicted: They're being held in jail *pretrial* while considered innocent because, unlike those who have money, they can't afford bail.⁵ *This is wrong.* **Rikers has become the city's largest mental health facility.** More than 50 percent of people incarcerated there have been diagnosed with a mental health condition, yet they have little or no access to meaningful care while they are locked up.⁶

Under Mayor Eric Adams, conditions at Rikers have gotten worse. Violence at Rikers is out of control. At least 26 people have died in the city jail system since Adams became mayor in 2022.⁷ But the actual number of deaths is unknown, because under this administration, the Department of Correction (DOC) has become less transparent and has declared that they will stop reporting deaths to the public.⁸

The DOC is plagued by crises and scandals, exacerbating harms to people in its jails. This has only gotten worse under Mayor Adams. Now the DOC is attempting to hide its extraordinary dysfunction by refusing to release information to the public.⁹ In response to this disaster, the federal monitor, appointed by the federal courts in 2015, has sounded the alarm about "imminent risk of harm" foreveryone at Rikers – the people incarcerated and those who work there.¹⁰



MAYOR ADAMS WANTS RIKERS TO STAY OPEN.

Under Mayor Adams, the city is no longer on track to close Rikers. If Mayor Adams has his way, Rikers will stay open forever. In 2017, under pressure by community groups and other advocates who organized for many years, Bill de Blasio, then mayor, announced that New York City would close Rikers. It took until 2019 for the city council to pass a package of related bills that would shutter the jail complex by 2027.¹¹ Instead of trying to meet the benchmarks for the closure plan, Mayor Adams has worked to keep Rikers open and lock up more Black, brown, and low-income people. Instead of investing in real community safety – housing, health care, education, and jobs – Adams has cut budgets for essential services across the city and at Rikers, including vital alternatives to incarceration and reentry programming, while investing billions in police and jails.¹²

New York City's jail population is going up when it should be going down. As of July 17, 2023, more than 6,200 people were incarcerated in city jails – an increase of nearly 15 percent since Mayor Adams took office in 2022.¹³ That means 800 more people behind bars. Given the mayor's "jail first" approach, the DOC commissioner has stated that they expect the jail population to surpass 7,000 next year.¹⁴

The financial and human costs of this "jail first" approach are catastrophic. In fiscal year 2021, the DOC budget cost city taxpayers \$1.25 billion; the cost of incarceration here was \$556,539 a person per year, which is \$1,525 a day.¹⁵ The forecast reported for the DOC budget in fiscal year 2024 is nearly \$1.2 billion.¹⁶ In his initial 2024 budget, Adams proposed deep cuts to essential services including libraries and prekindergarten programs while spending billions on policing and jails.¹⁷ Communities fought back to re-store funding to libraries and other services, but Adams remains committed to locking up more people who are presumed innocent.

CLOSE RIKERS NOW

#CLOSERIKERS #CUSHUTINVESTNY

TAKE ACTION HERE:



The appalling problems at Rikers aren't new – they are all too familiar and dramatically underscore that the city needs alternatives to jail. With an unrelenting crisis at Rikers marked by a rapidly rising death toll, we need urgent action to save lives.

The City must close Rikers now – and close it now.

Mayor Adams and the New York City Council must:

- **CUT** the number of people held on Rikers and in all city jails and cut the budgets used for caging people.
- **SHUT** down the Rikers Island jail complex.
- **INVEST** in real community safety: housing, health care, education, and jobs.

Until Rikers is closed, the federal courts must appoint a receiver to take over city jails and improve conditions for the people incarcerated there and those who work there.¹⁸

For more information and to get involved, please contact:

Melanie Dominguez
Lead Organizer
Melanie@katalcenter.org
516-588-0127

KATAL
CENTER FOR EQUITY, HEALTH, & JUSTICE

July 2023

REFERENCES

- ¹ Erica Bryant. “[It’s] a Torture Chamber: Stories from Rikers Island.” Vera Institute of Justice. February 2022. vera.org/its-a-torture-chamber.
- ² Jonah E. Bromwich and Jan Ransom. “Rikers Still ‘Unstable and Unsafe’ Under New Jails Chief, Watchdog Says.” *The New York Times*. March 16, 2022. [nytimes.com/2022/03/16/nyregion/rikers-jail-violence-report.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/16/nyregion/rikers-jail-violence-report.html).
- ³ Black and Latino people are far more likely to be incarcerated at Rikers than white people facing similar charges. Young, LGBTQI, and gender nonconforming people face higher rates of violence. Concerns about young people and about transgender, gender nonconforming, nonbinary, and intersex (TGNCNBI) people on Rikers Island and in other jails and prisons have long warranted attention. To read more about issues for young people in the city’s jails, see “Case: Nunez and United States v. City of New York.” *Nunez and United States v. City of New York* 1:11-Cv-05845 (S.D.N.Y.), Civil Rights Litigation Clearinghouse, July 10, 2023. clearinghouse.net/case/12072. To read more about issues for TGNCNBI people in the city’s jails, see New York City Board of Correction. “Task Force on Issues Faced by TGNCNBI People in Custody.” Updated 2023. www1.nyc.gov/site/boc/jail-regulations/task-force-on-issues-faced-by-tgncbi.page
- ⁴ United States Census Bureau. “Quick Facts: New York City, New York.” July 1, 2021. census.gov/quickfacts/newyorkcitynewyork; Bruce Western, Jaclyn Davis, Flavien Ganter, and Natalie Smith. “The Cumulative Risk of Jail Incarceration.” *PNAS* 118, No. 16. (2021). pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2023429118; Reuven Blau. “Racial Gap in City Jails Has Only Gotten Worse, John Jay Study Finds.” *The City*. March 2, 2023.
- ⁵ Michael Rempel. *Decarceration in the Bail Reform Era: New York City’s Changing Jail Population Since 2019*. Data Collaborative for Justice at John Jay College. December 2022. https://datacollaborativeforjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Decarceration_Reform_Era_NYC7.pdf
- ⁶ Jan Ransom and Jonah E. Bromwich. “‘I Just Want to Be Normal’: A Mentally Ill Man’s Death at Rikers.” *The New York Times*. September 27, 2021. [nytimes.com/2021/09/27/nyregion/rikers-island-esias-johnson.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/27/nyregion/rikers-island-esias-johnson.html), citing Anthony Shorris and Mindy Tarlow. *Preliminary Mayor’s Management Report*, February 2016. 62. https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2016/2016_pmmr.pdf
- ⁷ Jan Ransom and Jonah E. Bromwich. “Tracking the Deaths in New York City’s Jail System.” *The New York Times*. February 4, 2023. www.nytimes.com/article/rikers-deaths-jail.html
- ⁸ Reuven Blau. “City Jails No Longer Announcing Deaths Behind Bars, Angering Watchdogs.” *The City*. May 31, 2023. <https://www.thecity.nyc/2023/5/31/23744666/correction-jails-not-announcing-deaths-rikers>
- ⁹ Hurubie Meko. “N.Y.C. Jails Chief Is Hiding Dysfunction at Rikers, Federal Monitor Says.” *The New York Times*. June 8, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/08/nyregion/rikers-island-jail-report.html>; Matt Katz. “Judge Will Consider Federal Takeover of NYC Jails, Including Rikers, This Summer.” *Gothamist*. June 13, 2023. <https://gothamist.com/news/judge-will-consider-federal-takeover-of-nyc-jails-including-rikers-this-summer>
- ¹⁰ Meko, “N.Y.C. Jails Chief”; Reuven Blau. “Secrecy on Severe Jail Injuries Spurs Rikers Monitor to Sound Alarm.” *The City*. May 29, 2023. <https://www.thecity.nyc/2023/5/29/23741411/rikers-jail-injuries-secrecy-corrections-monitor>; Matt Katz, “Rikers detainees at ‘imminent risk’ of harm; federal monitor alleges five new ‘disturbing’ incidents.” *Gothamist*. May 30, 2023. <https://gothamist.com/news/rikers-detainees-at-imminent-risk-of-harm-federal-monitor-alleges-five-new-disturbing-incidents>
- ¹¹ Matthew Haag. “N.Y.C. Votes to Close Rikers. Now Comes the Hard Part.” *The New York Times*. October 17, 2019. [nytimes.com/2019/10/17/nyregion/rikers-island-closing-vote.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/17/nyregion/rikers-island-closing-vote.html).
- ¹² Dana Rubinstein and Emma G. Fitzsimmons. “Libraries Spared but Rikers Suffers in \$107 Billion N.Y.C. Budget Deal.” *The New York Times*. June 29, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/29/nyregion/new-york-mayor-city-council-budget-deal.html>; Michael Gartland. “NYC Council Approves Mayor Adams’ New Budget, but 12 Lawmakers Dissent.” *New York Daily News*. June 30, 2023. <https://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/new-york-elections-government/ny-city-council-approves-adams-new-budget-20230630-labuyztiahrvddw7uggerzgysi-story.html>; Katie Honan. “Council Agrees to \$107 Billion Budget Handshake Just Before Deadline.” *The City*. June 29, 2023. <https://www.thecity.nyc/2023/6/29/23778920/city-council-budget-107-billion>; Vera Institute of Justice. *A Look Inside the Fiscal Year 2024 New York City Department of Correction Budget*. March 2023. <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/A-Look-Inside-the-Fiscal-Year-2024-New-York-City-Department-of-Correction-Budget.pdf>
- ¹³ The population in city jails on January 3, 2022 (the first weekday of Mayor Adams’s term) was 5,400. Vera Institute of Justice. “People in Jail in New York City: Daily Snapshot.” July 18, 2023. <https://greaterjusticenyc.vera.org/nycjail/>
- ¹⁴ Courtney Gross. “Rikers Closure Plan Not on Track, Commissioner Says.” *Spectrum News NY1*. December 13, 2022. <https://www.ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2022/12/14/rikers-closure-plan-not-on-track--commissioner-says>
- ¹⁵ New York City Comptroller. “Comptroller Stringer: Cost of Incarceration per Person in New York City Skyrockets to All-Time High.” December 6, 2021. comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/comptroller-stringer-cost-of-incarceration-per-person-in-new-york-city-skyrockets-to-all-time-high-2
- ¹⁶ New York City Mayor’s Office of Management and Budget. “Expense Budget: Agency Budget Forecast” for the Department of Correction. Updated June 2023. <https://www.nyc.gov/site/omb/publications/agency-budgets-projections.page?projection=072>
- ¹⁷ Rubinstein and Fitzsimmons, “Libraries Spared”; Honan, “Council Agrees to \$107 Billion Budget Handshake.”
- ¹⁸ Matt Katz. “Feds Call for Takeover of NYC Jail System as Humanitarian Crisis at Rikers Spirals.” *Gothamist*. July 17, 2023. <https://gothamist.com/news/feds-call-for-takeover-of-nyc-jail-system-as-humanitarian-crisis-at-rikers-spirals>