



**For Immediate Release**  
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## **Momentum Builds for Criminal Justice Reform in New York City**

### **Nearly 60 Diverse Organizations Join Urgent Call to Close Rikers Island Jail Complex**

#### **Groups Rally at City Hall A Day Before The First Convening of The Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform—**

**April 14, 2016 (New York, NY)**— The #CLOSErikers coalition held a rally on the steps of New York City Hall today, in a major public kick-off of their campaign to close Rikers Island Jail Complex. Organizers at the rally announced that a diverse array of nearly 60 NYC-based organizations have joined the call to #CLOSErikers - including faith based organizations, community groups, legal and policy organizations, housing providers, health and treatment providers, and many more. Dozens joined today's rally at City Hall and called on Mayor Bill de Blasio to close the notorious jail complex and invest in building a more fair, just, and equitable New York City.

The criminal justice system in NYC is broken. Approximately 85% of the people at Rikers Island are being held pre-trial – they have not been convicted of a crime, but are too poor to make bail. The overwhelming majority of detainees facing misdemeanors have bail set at less than \$1000. More than 90% of the Rikers population is Black or Latino, and many are from New York City's lowest income neighborhoods. Violence by the Department of Correction staff against detainees rose every year from 2008 to 2014. Nearly every week, if not every day, a new, horrific story emerges from Rikers. Violence, corruption, and even death have become commonplace.

Momentum to close Rikers is building. Dozens of organizations have joined the call to close Rikers. A growing number of elected officials are expressing their support to shutter the facility. And today's rally was held one day before the first meeting of the newly-formed Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform. The Commission was created by NYC City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, who stated, "We must explore how we can get the population on Rikers to be so small that the dream of shutting it down becomes a reality." Chaired by former New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, the Commission includes Glenn E. Martin, Founder and President of JustLeadershipUSA. Martin – one of the nation's leading criminal justice reform experts – was detained on Rikers nearly 20 years ago, and the violence he survived back then would be familiar to any New Yorker reading the news today.

To close Rikers, New York City must fix its broken, racially biased criminal justice system. Effective reforms to New York City's speedy trial laws and its bail system alone would remove thousands of people from New York City pre-trial detention. For example, there are currently approximately 2,000 New Yorkers who have been awaiting trial on Rikers Island for more than a year – some have been held for 5 years or more, awaiting trial and unable to make bail. Vast sums of taxpayer funds are spent every year on a broken system that Rikers represents. Detaining a person on Rikers Island costs New York City taxpayers \$167,000 per year, and simply transporting Rikers detainees to courts in all five

boroughs costs \$25 million a year. These costs don't contribute to public safety, instead serve to destabilize communities – especially low income communities of color.

Rikers has long been broken -- marked by violence and corruption. Yet Rikers has been seemingly impervious to reform. The #CLOSErikers campaign was formed to break the political gridlock and achieve real solutions. The campaign is calling for New Yorker's to boldly reimagine the city's broken criminal justice system. By closing Rikers, New York City can focus on healing and rebuilding communities.

*The #CLOSErikers campaign is led by JustLeadershipUSA in partnership with the Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice.*

**Quotes:**

"The more Mayor Bill de Blasio mentions the Tale of Two Cities, the more I wonder whether he understands that there is a third city: Rikers Island, a place where thousands of New Yorkers, including children, are robbed of their sanity, their dignity, their families, their communities and sometimes, their lives. A City as progressive and resource-rich as New York should be ashamed of investing taxpayer dollars in a human grist-mill, just 200 feet away from the runways of LaGuardia Airport." ***–Glenn E. Martin, President and Founder, JustLeadershipUSA***

"Rikers represents the worst aspects of New York's broken criminal justice system -- it is wasteful, racially biased, unjust, cruel, and does little for public safety. Too many continue to suffer on Rikers. Many have needlessly died. After over 40 years of the failed war on drugs and mass incarceration, it is time for more effective approaches. The City must close Rikers, once and for all." ***–gabriel sayegh, Co-Founder & Co-Director, Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice***

"Rikers cannot be fixed. The culture is too toxic, the location is too distant from courts and families, and the jails are too decrepit for it to continue as a place of detention, let alone provide rehabilitative services that are necessary for public safety." ***–Donna Lieberman, Executive Director, New York Civil Liberties Union***

"Riker's has been deemed by the US Attorney Bharara to be a "broken institution." It is a constant stain on the city of New York that a place so infested with violence and brutality that it necessitates federal oversight is allowed to exist. It is immoral and inhumane. It must be closed." ***–Khary Lazarre-White, Esq., Executive Director & Co-Founder, The Brotherhood/Sister Sol***

"Jesus made it clear that he considered our treatment of people in prison an indicator of how we treat Him. For that reason, I believe that Jesus, who himself was arrested, imprisoned, and convicted, would say 'Close Rikers.' " ***–Rev. Rubén Austria, Executive Director Community Connections for Youth***

"As an immigrant, I had to study the ideals and history of the U.S. Constitution in order to pass the test to become a naturalized U.S. citizen. But I have watched the U.S. Constitution being completely trampled for the five and a half years that my son has been locked up without facing trial on Rikers Island, as his civil and constitutional rights are violated." ***–Anna P., Mother of a man currently detained on Rikers Island***

**Groups Calling to #CLOSErikers**

1. JustLeadershipUSA	5. Bronx Defenders
2. Katal Center for Health, Equity and Justice	6. BronxConnect
3. VOCAL-NY	7. Brooklyn Community Bail Fund
4. Anti-Racist Alliance	8. Brooklyn Defender Services
	9. Brotherhood-Sister Sol

- 10. CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities
- 11. Campaign to Shut Down Rikers
- 12. CASES
- 13. Center for Community Alternatives
- 14. Center for Constitutional Rights
- 15. Center for NuLeadership
- 16. Citizens Against Recidivism Inc.
- 17. CoDA
- 18. College and Community Fellowship
- 19. Community Connections For Youth
- 20. Connecting the Dots
- 21. Corporation for Supportive Housing
- 22. Correctional Association of New York
- 23. DriveChangeNYC
- 24. Education from the Inside Out Coalition
- 25. Enlace
- 26. Exodus Transitional Community
- 27. Exponents
- 28. Faith in New York
- 29. Greenhope Services For Women
- 30. Harm Reduction Coalition
- 31. Housing Plus Solutions
- 32. Immigrant Defense Project
- 33. Incarcerated Nation Campaign
- 34. Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing
- 35. Jews for Racial and Economic Justice
- 36. LatinoJustice PRLDEF
- 37. Legal Action Center
- 38. Mekong NYC
- 39. Million Hoodies
- 40. National Action Network – NYC Chapter Second Chance Committee
- 41. National Association of Social Workers – NYC Chapter
- 42. National Lawyers Guild
- 43. New York Civil Liberties Union
- 44. One Thousand Arms
- 45. Osborne Association
- 46. Picture the Homeless
- 47. Precedential Group
- 48. Release Aging Prisoners Project
- 49. The Fortune Society
- 50. The Gathering for Justice / Justice League NYC
- 51. The Legal Aid Society
- 52. Urban Justice Center
- 53. WBAI's "On the Count"
- 54. Women and Justice Project
- 55. Women's Prison Association
- 56. Working Families Party
- 57. WORTH
- 58. Youth Represent

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