



**Rikers Island and Mental Health:
Pathways Toward Community-Based
Diversion and Jail Population Reduction**

November 2025

DATA COLLABORATIVE FOR JUSTICE
* JOHN JAY COLLEGE
STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

KATAL
CENTER FOR EQUITY, HEALTH, & JUSTICE

Rikers Island and Mental Health

Data, Lived Experience, and Community-Based Alternatives

January 15, 2026



6, 824 people
incarcerated in New York City jails
as of January 14, 2026

Pretrial Detention – 84%

Jail Sentences – 8%

Parole Violation – 4%

Awaiting Transfer to State Prison – 3%

Other – 2%

(Note: Seasonal fluctuation.)

Source: Data Collaborative for Justice, New York City Jail Population Tracker

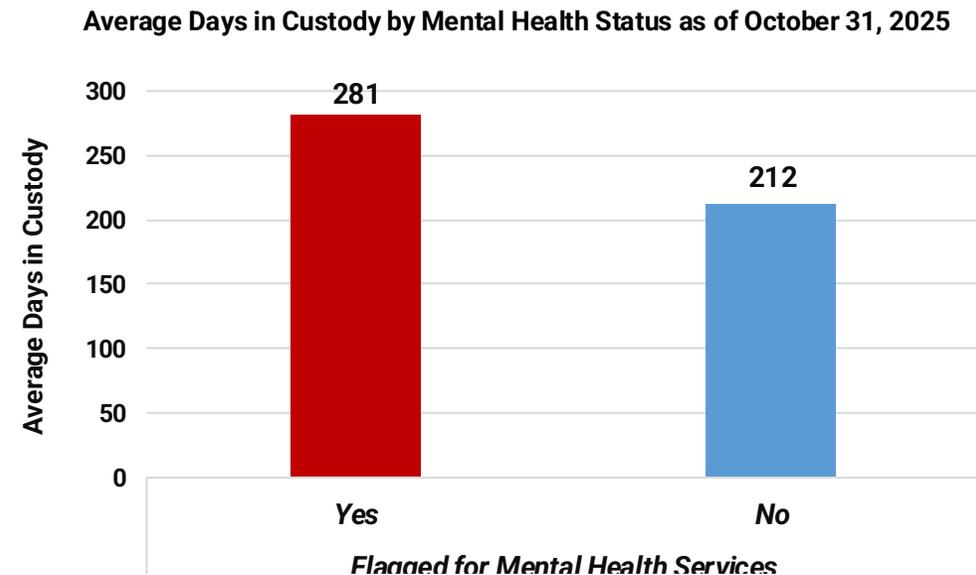
Latest Facts about New York City Jails

Mental Health:

- Ballooning sub-population with mental health needs (60% flag, 22% with SMI).
 - *Increasing over time*
- ~200 held at Rikers for mental competency proceedings
- Characteristics
 - Women flag at a higher rate than men (87% vs. 58%)
 - Race differences are small; Black people make up 58% of the population (61% flag)
- Disproportionate time in custody (281 days vs. 212 days)



Source: Data Collaborative for Justice. [New York City Jail Population Tracker](#) (screenshot as of November 3, 2025).



Latest Facts about New York City Jails

Physical Health:

- Substance abuse health needs (**25%** with opioid use disorder, **30%** with alcohol use disorder)
- Chronic medical health needs
- Homelessness (**28%**; jumps to **42%** with SMI)
- Medical no-shows (rate of missing med. Appt. was **2,207** per 1,000 in Sept 25; Production Refusal highest recorded reason)

Correctional Health Services, Sept 2025

Exposure to Violence (comparing August 2019 to August 2025)

- Monthly stabbings and slashings per 1,000 rose from **0.95** to **2.94**
- Fights among incarcerated people rose from **65.6** to **79.3**
- Assaults on staff declined from **15.5** to **9.5**
- Comparing 2020, Quarter 3 to 2025, Quarter 3, **use of force rates** per 100 ADP decreased (**35.98** and **25.14** respectively).

New York City Comptroller. Department of Correction Dashboard.
(Rates are recomputed based on the dashboard's raw data.)

Policy Recommendations

- **The Big Picture:** *Essential Areas for Smart Jail Reduction to $\leq 4,200$.*
 - **Early Release from Jail Sentences** to Supervision & Services (*e.g.*, “6-A” Program).
 - **Less Unaffordable Bail** at Arraignment (release if low risk; adjust bail to ability to pay).
 - **“Second-Look” Policies** (assess, review, & release initially detained people to services).
 - **Case Processing Reforms** (*i.e.*, shrink pretrial length of stay in jail).
 - **Implementation Focus** (*e.g.*, judicial training, bench cards, assessments, case management).
 - **New Diversion Investments** (*e.g.*, housing, mental health, medical condition, women, ages 55+).

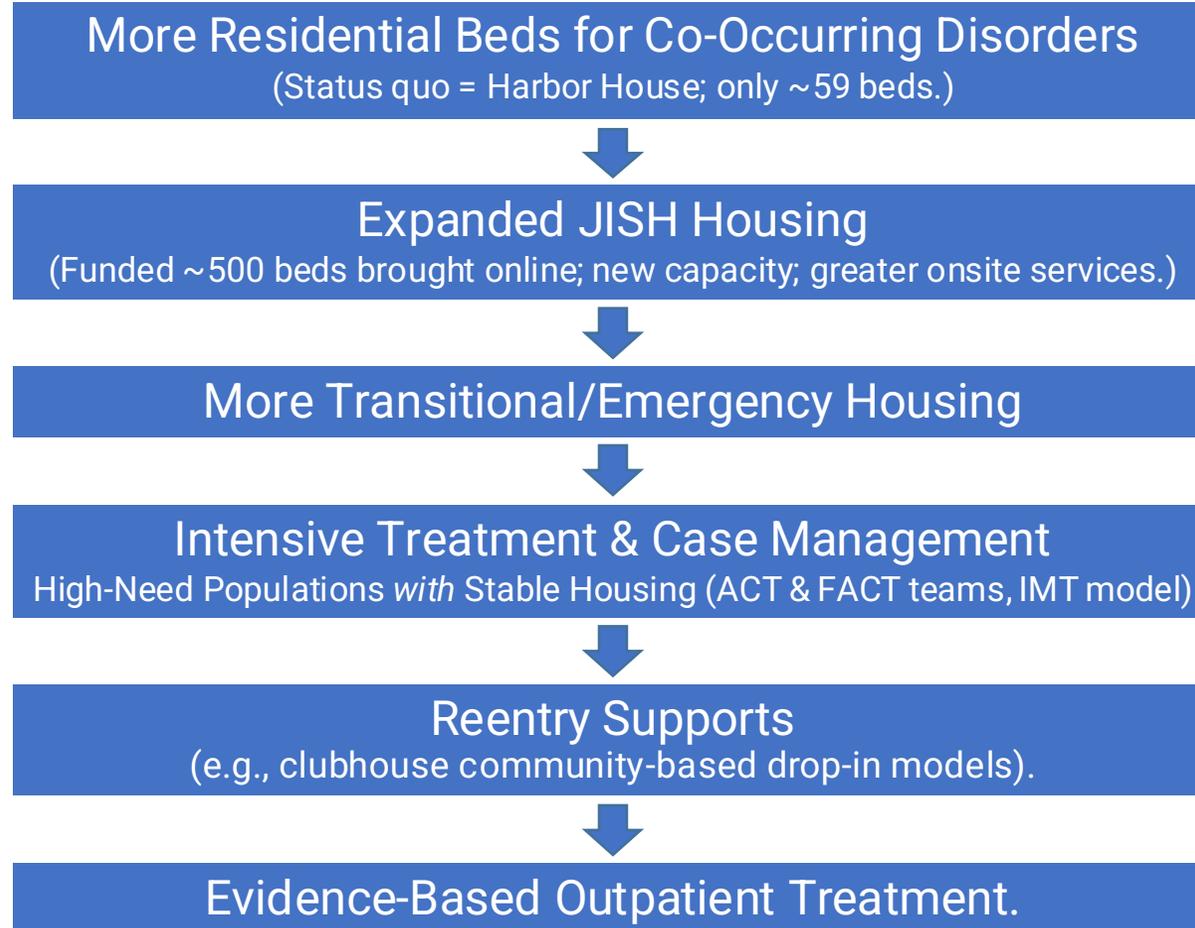
Policy Recommendations

- **This Report's Approach:** *One-Stop Resource: Synthesize and expand on past work.*
 - Jail Reduction Roadmap (2021).
 - Rikers Commission report (2025).

- **Five Categories of Recommendations:**
 - A. Continuum of Diversion Options.
 - B. Alternatives for People in Mental Competency Proceedings.
 - C. Greater Access to Mental Health Courts.
 - D. Implementation: Effective Linkages from Courts and Jails to Treatment.
 - E. Hospital-Based Therapeutic Beds in Lieu of Rikers.

A. City-Led Continuum of Mental Health Diversion & Housing Investments (7 recommendations)

Continuum of Mental Health & Housing Options*



** Options displayed from most to least restrictive, but with a working assumption of need-based decision-making that applies the least restrictive setting necessary.*

B. Alternatives for People at All Stages of Mental Competency Proceedings

- 8. Reducing Jail at All Three Stages:** For people in mental competency proceedings, create and fund suitable community-based treatment options in lieu of incarceration at each of three key stages:
- a) Pending a mental competency assessment and determination.
 - b) After found unfit to stand trial.
 - c) After restored to competency (e.g., automatic mental health court referral).

C. Greater Access to Mental Health Courts

9. **Legislation:** Pass the Treatment Court Expansion Act or similar legislation, granting judges the authority to order a clinical assessment and enroll anyone in a mental health court who is deemed to have a functional impairment, regardless of the charge.
9. **Implementation:** Ensure good implementation of mental health courts and take other measures to promote clinically informed decision making, such as training judges in mental illness, mental health court operations, and these courts' effectiveness with varied populations, including those charged with a violent felony.

D. Effective Linkages from Courts and Jails to Community-Based Treatment

11. **Convenings/Updates with the Court:** Provide regularly scheduled updates to the court on the prevalence of mental illness and conditions at Rikers Island.
11. **Training on Treatment Options:** Inform and train judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys in available community-based treatment and housing options.
11. **Case Management & Coordination:** Ensure seamless coordination with treatment providers, including written protocols around how case managers can swiftly place people in treatment or housing slots reserved for system-involved individuals.
11. **Individualized Assessments:**
 - Pre-incarceration MH screening before or right after arraignment.
 - Protocols to communicate a release recommendation to the court after jail intake.
 - Regular reassessments of people's mental health if they remain in jail.
 - protocols to protect client confidentiality regarding sensitive personal information.

E. Hospital-Based Secure Therapeutic Beds in Lieu of Rikers

This recommendation is a last resort. It is not a true alternative to incarceration.

- 15. Open Promised Hospital Beds:** Act swiftly to bring 350 promised secure off-jail hospital beds online for people with a serious medical condition or mental illness, while rigorously and objectively considering whether more such beds may be necessary.

The Human Impact

Danielle Shanks, member of Katal Center

“My son, who has a severe mental illness, is currently being detained at Rikers Island ... Recently, he has been advocating for access to outdoor recreation, which for no apparent reason was being restricted. All of these conditions only exacerbate his mental illness and prevent him from reaching his fullest potential. Words cannot explain how terrible Rikers Island is—it fails to keep people safe and harms human lives ... In the first year that my son was detained at Rikers, a judge at the Mental Health Court found my son unfit, and since then, we have been waiting for him to be released to receive treatment within the community. Recently, the District Attorney denied my son access to programs, and there is currently no avenue for him to get released and receive the treatment he needs...”

Some Themes:

- Poor conditions at Rikers (restricted outdoor recreation & access to programs) exacerbating mental illness.
- Found unfit to stand trial and awaiting treatment – *an issue addressed in report’s recommendations.*
- Danielle’s son is still at Rikers today.

Meet Our Speaker

The Human Impact

Tracy Barber, member of Treatment Not Jails

The Treatment Court Expansion Act

Stephanie Bazell, New York County Defender Services

There is a mental health crisis in our State, and our default response is to warehouse people in prisons and jails.

In 2009, Drug Law Reform established drug courts in every county. The Treatment Court Expansion Act modernizes and expands this existing state law, removing arbitrary barriers to participation and ending the revolving door of incarceration for people with mental health and substance use disorders.

Diversion helps decarcerate and leads to healthier, happier communities.

Join us on January 20th in Albany to advocate for the Treatment Court Expansion Act!

Discussion and Q&A

Please share questions you have for our speakers by clicking on the Q&A button at the bottom of your Zoom screen!

Thank you!



For More Information

- See [The Report](#).
- Contact Us.

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