



Testimony

Oversight Hearing – Maternal Health and Criminal Justice

Ziyadah Amatul-Matin, Katal Center Member

for

Committee on Criminal Justice & Committee on Women and
Gender Equity

Tuesday, October 27, 2026 -- 10:00 AM
New York, NY

Thank you, Councilmember Selvena N. Brooks-Powers & Councilmember Amanda Farias, for holding this joint hearing on the maternal health of the women detained in New York City jails. My name is Ziyadah Amatul-matin, and I am a member of the Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice. As someone who has had family members incarcerated at Rikers Island, I know first-hand how dire the conditions are there. Every minute that passes by is another minute that the people detained there run the risk of losing their lives.

We submit this testimony to bring your attention to the ever-growing crisis at Rikers and the need to reduce the city's jail population and shutter the notorious and deadly jail complex. We are grateful to the council for introducing legislation that would require the Department of Correction, in coordination with Correctional Health Services, to establish and maintain written protocols related to the identification, screening, referral, monitoring, and follow-up care of pregnant or postpartum individuals with mental health needs. As a mother myself, I can affirm that pregnancy, postpartum recovery, and parenting do not stop at a jail gate. And it is infuriating to know that the women detained at Rikers are met with a system that fails to provide them with the wrap-around services that they need to ensure their health and that of their babies. This system is perpetuating generational trauma. I want to be clear that no city that is serious about reversing maternal mortality— particularly the deadly racial disparities that we face as Black women— can continue to cage women on an island with a deep history of abuse and medical neglect. The care they need is not getting delivered. What is being done is simply putting a bandage on a wound that is far too deep and must be aggressively treated. In this case, what the women need is the immediate closure of the Rikers Island Jail Complex, including the Rose M. Singer Center. These women should be in the community getting the care and support they deserve.

As the humanitarian crisis at Rikers continues, New Yorkers' tax dollars are being used to perpetuate this violence. According to the City Comptroller's Office, incarceration at Rikers costs roughly \$500,000 per person per year, or \$1,390 per *day*.ⁱ Incarcerating people in these inhumane conditions does not create safer communities, nor does it address survivors' needs. Investing in alternatives to incarceration has been proven to significantly reduce recidivism compared to jail and prison, and it also allows survivors to see the people who harm them held accountable and forge a pathway forward to create safer communities.ⁱⁱ This is money that can be used to provide pregnancy care for Black women and women of color. This is money we can invest in our babies' education.

We urge these two committees, and the full council, to use their legislative and budgetary power to reduce the jail population, advance the closure of Rikers with a clear timeline, and hold the mayor accountable to the closure law. Lives are at stake.

We urge this council to focus on three things: first, cut the budgets used for caging people – the DOC budget is bloated, wasteful, and must be cut. The city must also reduce the number of people incarcerated at Rikers. Second, the closure of Rikers is not just a moral and legal imperative, but given the extraordinary savings that can be realized, it is also a fiscal imperative. The Council must pass legislation and budgets that advance efforts to shutter the notorious jail complex. Third, we must increase investments in things that produce real community safety: housing, healthcare, including mental health, education, and jobs. The city must also invest in responses to violence that are survivor-centered, accountability-based, safety-driven, and racially equitable.

The City Council must advance the closure of Rikers and hold the mayor accountable to the closure law.

ⁱ New York City Comptroller. “Ensuring Timely Trials.” July 16, 2024.

<https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/ensuring-timely-trials/>

ⁱⁱ Common Justice. “How and Why Many Survivors Benefit From Restorative Justice Alternatives to Incarceration.” January 21, 226. <https://commonjustice.org/resource/how-and-why-many-survivors-benefit-from-restorative-justice-alternatives-to-incarceration>