



POLICY PLATFORM

I. PROVIDE SAFETY FOR INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS RELEASED DURING COVID-19.

PROVIDE IDENTIFICATION UPON RELEASE

Service providers report that individuals are being released from Rikers Island without their personal belongings, including IDs; and many people lack valid identification to begin with. ID cards are critical for accessing housing and public benefits, and the lack of these documents can lead to further police abuse.

An executive order by Mayor Bill de Blasio or the Human Resources Administration (HRA) Commissioner Steve Banks, followed by interagency collaboration, could ensure that every person released from Rikers Island is equipped with IDNYC, Mayor de Blasio's signature municipal identification card program.

EFFECTIVELY TRANSITION PEOPLE'S HEALTHCARE FROM RIKERS TO THEIR COMMUNITY

Individuals have been released from Rikers Island without sufficient medication or immediate access to Medicaid coverage. Many service providers are unable to quickly access health records, rendering them unable to meet clients' needs, particularly for those who struggle with mental health issues and substance abuse.

Executive action by the Mayor and practice change at the Department of Correction (DOC) and Correctional Health Services (CHS) could ensure continuity of care between correctional and community settings. State departments may play a key role, too. Mayor Bill de Blasio, Department of Correction Commissioner Cynthia Brann, and Senior Vice President for Correctional Health Services Patsy Yang can make the healthcare transition smoother.

PROVIDE EVERY INDIVIDUAL WITH COVID-19 TESTING AND VACCINE ACCESS

The COVID-19 infection rate on Rikers Island has been several times higher than that in the whole of New York City, the epicenter of the pandemic. Like those living in other congregate settings, New Yorkers in our jails are at extraordinarily high risk for infection from COVID-19 because conditions do not allow for physical distancing. Additionally, the staff who work with them go home to their families, increasing the risk of spread.

Because they reside in close quarters with no way to physically distance, incarcerated New Yorkers and the staff who work with them should be prioritized for access to vaccination alongside other high-risk groups per federal CDC guidelines. These New Yorkers should also be guaranteed COVID-19 testing as part of the discharge process, allowing them to protect their families and communities.

While the Governor must approve access to vaccines, distributing tests and vaccines will require cooperation of City agencies and leadership from Mayor de Blasio.

II. UNLOCK HOUSING SUPPLY FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

END NYCHA PERMANENT EXCLUSIONS

The New York City Housing Authority, like many private landlords, discriminates against New Yorkers who have been involved with the criminal legal system. The administration of NYCHA, on behalf of the City of New York, has the power to deem NYCHA residents as “dangerous” and “undesirable,” leading to their permanent exclusion from their homes and to separation from their family members. NYCHA Permanent Exclusions, as this collection of policy is called, go beyond federal requirements of the Trump Administration by broadly removing individuals with any kind of criminal record and even residents who have been arrested and not convicted of a crime. By being evicted from their homes and separated from their families, this policy makes NYCHA residents homeless and creates the conditions for recidivism.

To ensure that justice-involved New Yorkers can stay in their homes, with their families, NYCHA should revise its guidance and stop prohibiting housing to individuals with any criminal record. Ending NYCHA Permanent Exclusion will require regulatory changes mandated by Vicki Been, Deputy Mayor of Housing and Economic Development, and/or Greg Russ, the chair of the housing authority.

INSTITUTIONALIZE NYCHA FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROGRAM

NYCHA knows what it takes to break the cycle of incarceration to homelessness and recidivism. The NYCHA Family Reunification Program launched in 2013 as a pilot for individuals who are transitioning from jail and prison to connect them with support services related to education and employment. Since then, the program has successfully reunited over 100 families and serves as a source of critical information for justice-involved families as they navigate the transition. A 2017 study by the Vera Institute showed that 68% of program participants were reunited with at least one parent and 15% were reunited with their children. Nearly half of those surveyed said that they would be forced onto the streets, shelters, or three-quarters housing were it not for the program.

Currently this program is only supported by two staff across all NYCHA housing developments. It is time for this program to become an expanded, permanent fixture of the reentry system in NYCHA and support the reunification of families. The program has garnered unprecedented success and if it is brought to scale, it could reduce our growing homeless population. Vicki Been, the Deputy Mayor of Housing and Economic Development, should ensure that the NYCHA Family Reunification Program is scaled to be a permanent unit, and the City Council must allocate funding to expand service provision.

EXPAND WHO QUALIFIES FOR FEDERALLY FUNDED SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Individuals who are jailed for 90+ days do not meet the federal government’s definition for chronic homelessness, excluding them from federally funded supportive housing. Legislation from Congress and a new rule from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) would revise the criteria to expand housing opportunities for those who need support services.

The Mayor’s Office of Intergovernmental Affairs (MOIGA), led by Lydon Sleeper, can make this a priority for the City in Washington, D.C.

INCREASE THE SUPPLY AND VALUE OF HOUSING VOUCHERS + COMBAT LANDLORD DISCRIMINATION

Advocates believe that the City continues to hold onto rental housing assistance vouchers during the COVID-19 crisis even though they could immediately secure permanent housing for people

experiencing housing insecurity. The City's own voucher program does not meet fair market value, rendering them useless for many.

Through executive action, Mayor Bill de Blasio can command several city agencies to make the vouchers available immediately and lengthen the time by which they must be used. The City Council, led by Speaker Corey Johnson, can pass legislation that increases voucher value and that bans property owners and their contractors from considering criminal records when leasing housing units. Council Member Stephen Levin is taking a leading role in fair chance housing legislation.

ALLOCATE A PORTION OF CITY-FINANCED HOUSING TO JUSTICE-INVOLVED NEW YORKERS

The NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) finances the development of affordable housing projects across the city, including on public land. HPD often sets aside a portion of the available housing units for certain populations like those residing in the local community, city employees, and New Yorkers with disabilities. The agency can similarly set aside a portion of affordable housing units for families with justice-involved members.

Mayor Bill de Blasio, Deputy Mayor Vicki Been, HPD Commissioner Louise Carroll, and Housing Development Corporation (HDC) Commissioner Eric Enderlin should act from the executive side. Robert Cornegy, Chair of the Committee on Housing and Buildings, can hold the administration accountable and support through legislation.

CREATE NEW JUSTICE-INVOLVED SUPPORTIVE AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

While the City has master-leased hotels to provide emergency housing for some released from jails, there is no pathway to permanent housing for these individuals. The Mayor and City Council can increase funding in the current fiscal year for developing transitional and permanent supportive housing. This could mean focusing on Justice-Involved Supportive Housing that avoids federal restrictions and moving up the allocation of \$25 million promised in the Close Rikers Points of Agreement from FY22.

Mayor Bill de Blasio, Deputy Mayor Vicki Been, and commissioners for housing, health, and social services must act from the executive side. In addition to City Council Speaker Corey Johnson, members such as Stephen Levin, Vanessa Gibson, Daniel Dromm, and Brad Lander have been vocal on the relevant spending issues.

III. DEVELOP A COORDINATED REENTRY SYSTEM ACCOUNTABLE TO THE WELL-BEING OF EACH PERSON.

No one agency or individual is accountable for leading reentry services nor held accountable to the outcomes of individuals once released from jail. Working in close collaboration with justice-involved individuals, advocates, and experts, the mayor can use his authority to create a unified re-entry system that coordinates the actions of the Department of Correction, Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Social Services, and Department of Housing Preservation and Development. The City Council can codify changes into law to outlast this administration.

Ultimately, the mayor must take a leading role in such interagency coordination. Codifying changes will need to involve chairs from the committees on public safety, criminal justice, and the justice system.