

TRINITY CHURCH WALL STREET

03.20.23 - Trinity Church Testimony - Public Safety Committee - FY24 Preliminary Budget

Monday, March 20, 2023 | **Subject:** FY23 Preliminary Budget Priorities - Public Safety

To Chair Hanks and Members of the Public Safety Committee:

My name is Susan Shah and I am the Managing Director of Racial Justice at Trinity Church Wall Street. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for the Committee's Fiscal Year 2024 Preliminary Budget Hearing. Below, I provide recommendations for the investments we believe should be included in this year's budget to make New York City safer and for more just for all.

Trinity Church Wall Street is an Episcopal Church in Lower Manhattan with a congregation of more than 1,600 parishioners, who represent all five boroughs and form an ethnically, racially, and economically diverse congregation. In addition to our ministry, we carry out the mission of faith and social justice through direct services, grantmaking, and advocacy.

Trinity has a long history of advancing social justice in alignment with our belief that every person is created in the image of God and has dignity and value. Trinity has a particular focus on strengthening the wellbeing of young people, families and our community, particularly as our city strives for an equitable recovery, recognizing that those hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout are Black and brown New Yorkers.

In this context and as faith leaders and fellow New Yorkers, we continue to be deeply concerned about the ongoing crisis in the City's jails, coupled with the recent increase in total jail population. According to the City Comptroller's [DOC Dashboard](#), the jail population has steadily increased and stands at 5,915 individuals as of March 1st. Additionally, the [rate of death](#) among those held on Rikers Island has dramatically increased since 2019, with 2021 and 2022 seeing the highest rate of death compared to any other year since 2000. Also, the average number of incarcerated individuals with a mental illness also continues to climb with [more than 50% of people currently detained on Rikers island having a mental health diagnosis, as well as hundreds of people languishing on Rikers every day simply because they are homeless.](#)

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To address these challenges while at the same time making the city safer, elected leaders need to support solutions that reduce the need for incarceration, prevent individuals in crisis from interacting with the criminal justice system in the first place, and lower the rate of recidivism. To achieve these goals, we urge the Mayor and City Council to commit to the following:

- 1. Expand and enhance mental health services, particularly for those in crisis, to reduce unnecessary interactions with law enforcement and the justice system by:**
 - a. Ensuring effective implementation of the recently released [Mental Health Plan for NYC](#) by allocating sufficient funding and staff, specifically to:
 - i. Add two peers to every mobile crisis team to divert people in mental health crisis from unnecessary hospitalizations or to follow up with them after hospital discharge to connect them to community care
 - ii. Expand the Behavioral Health Emergency Assistance Response Division (B-HEARD) citywide to respond to more mental health-related crises with a health-led response by mental health clinicians and emergency medical technicians (EMTs)
 - iii. Expand clubhouses across the boroughs to connect more people to care, and robust community-based recovery models, including respite centers
- 2. Allocate additional funding for the effective implementation of the 988 suicide and crisis hotline.**

This program provides critical support to people in suicidal crisis or mental-health related distress by trained counselors so they and/or their loved ones do not have to rely solely on 911.
- 3. Honor New York City's commitment to closing the jails on Rikers Island by 2027 and replacing them with smaller and more humane borough-based jails.** This must include fully funding the [recommendations](#) of the Commission on Reinvestment and the Closure of Rikers which are designed to expand access to mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and alternatives to incarceration – all of which help prevent more individuals from entering and re-entering the justice system and make New York City safer.
- 4. Invest in permanent housing, health and mental health care, job training and placement assistance, and other services that support New Yorkers in their communities and prevent unnecessary incarceration.** This includes:
 - a. Supporting youth by:
 - i. expanding community- and school-based behavioral health services and telehealth options to access mental health care
 - ii. maintaining the current \$207.4 million budget for the Summer Youth Employment Program, and it and make afterschool available year-round

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- b. Increase and improve the City's supportive housing stock for New Yorkers unable to live in traditional housing by allocating:
 - i. [\\$57.8 million in expense funding for supportive housing](#) for people who cycle in and out of the City's jail system (**\$12.8 million** for Justice-Involved Supportive Housing and **\$45 million** to support rental subsidy increases and higher service rates for supportive housing)
 - ii. **\$152 million** for the development, preservation, and rehabilitation of congregate supportive housing units
 - c. Increase the supply of transitional housing with **\$46 million** in additional funding to support the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice emergency hotels, which serve people released from City jails, and ensure seamless transitions into permanent or supportive housing options
- 5. Expand access to the Supervised Release Program by allocating an additional \$62 million.** This pretrial supervision program provides justice-involved individuals with the opportunity to access services while awaiting their trial instead of being detained in City jails, thereby providing an effective tool to reduce the City's total jail population. This increase in funding (in addition to the current \$67 million budget) would support a "high intensity" track for individuals with higher needs and charges than what the program was originally designed to support

Thank you for providing Trinity Church with the opportunity to submit this testimony.