The Rikers Jail Complex

The 8 active jails on Rikers are isolated, dysfunctional, and have been notorious for violence for decades.

Connected by one bridge and built on landfill, the Rikers jails isolated and subject to toxins, asbestos, malfunctioning heating and cooling systems and sewage management issues. The design and location of the jails creates cruel and inhumane conditions for people on the island, but the jails also have a deep-seated culture of violence.

Rates of serious injury and use of force against detainees has risen, despite a steady decline in the number of jailed people. Much of this violence is also underreported.

These jails – which were declared unconstitutional by federal prosecutors in 2014 – are symbolic of deeper issues in our criminal justice system:

- **86%** of people in NYC jails are Black or Latinx
- **44%** have a mental health diagnosis

73% of people at Rikers are simply detained awaiting trial. The Rikers jails harm communities and don't improve public safety, costing NYC over $2 Billion a year – $302,000 per person – to operate.

Rikers is an accelerator of human misery that can't be reformed. The Rikers jails must closed – permanently.
How Do We Close Rikers?

Rethink Incarceration

Use jail as a last resort by diverting people with mental health and substance use issues out of the criminal justice system, expanding the use of alternatives to incarceration (ATI's), reforming pretrial detention, reforming the parole system, and investing money saved in communities, especially those most impacted by the criminal justice system.

Create a Smaller Borough Based System

The Rikers jails can't be reformed, they must be shut down permanently. The City must shift to a much smaller borough system of detention, with facilities designed with the guiding principles of safety, dignity, treatment, and programming, with comprehensive re-entry planning services. This smaller system could save NYC more than $1.8 Billion annually, which should be reinvested in communities most impacted by the criminal justice system.

Where We Are Today

Since the #CLOSErikers campaign began in 2016, the city has reduced the number of people in jail by more than 3,000 people, all while maintaining record low crime rates. In April 2019, NYS legislators passed historic criminal justice reforms to limit the use of cash bail, and speed up case processing and evidence sharing during trial. On October 17, 2019, the City Council voted to approve a land use application to close Rikers and create a much smaller borough based detention system. This historic vote will lead our city towards a new era of justice. Now we must continue to invest in our communities and common sense reforms to make sure Rikers is closed once and for all.