



Good evening everyone my name is Tamika Graham, I am formerly incarcerated, I am HUMAN. I am testifying this evening in support of the Mayor's plan to go from 12 jails to 4 borough-based facilities - but I have a few conditions and changes I'd like to see to drastically improve this plan before the City Council votes on it. I stand before you today not just for myself but because I don't want any more Black, brown, and poor humans to be subjected to the injustices of Rikers Island and this flawed criminal justice system. Rikers Island must be closed down immediately. It serves no positive purpose.

Rikers cages human beings, with COs that treat them like animals — an entire workforce props up this abuse — and it is why we will not tolerate the Department of Corrections managing any new facilities. It costs taxpayers \$300,000 to jail one human on Rikers annually. This is money that could instead help people with basic needs, trauma care, drug use programs, and a range of programs geared toward making us and our communities healthier.

I was on Rikers island for the first time in 1995 while at the tender age of 16. The charges were attempted murder and attempted burglary as a result of me trying to protect myself from a 42 year old man who decided to force himself on me sexually because he thought i was developing well. The fact that this man sexually violated me, was not taken into consideration when the first offer I received was 25 years to life. I was a kid who had completed high school, had never been arrested, and was put through one of the most traumatizing situations in my young adolescent life and none of this was considered when I was offered a bail of \$50,000 that I obviously couldn't afford to pay. I was forced to sit on Rikers where I was put into an adolescents housing unit that was being run by male officers who reminded me of the type of man I had just escaped. They were just as abusive both mentally and emotionally so instead of me having that time to heal and work on my young self I had to learn to develop thick skin and I had to learn how to survive, otherwise Rikers Island would have chewed me up alive and spit me out. That place is nowhere fit for an adult, it definitely isn't fit for young adults, people with mental health issues or even drug issues. Rikers has a long and disturbing history of toxicity, violence and mental, physical, and emotional deaths. It is time we shut down rikers and build up our communities.

As I worked as a TASC instructor for students ages 16-24 who are working towards attaining their HSE diplomas in the Brownsville area, I asked one of my 18 year old students who wants to be a rapper, what he raps about and why? His reply was “ I rap about violence because that's the only thing I know — since I was a little kid it was everywhere. That's why I'm in this program now instead of getting my high school diploma. I got tired of having to fight my way to school everyday.” This is a sad reality for many. I witness so many young adults who want a better way of life but they see no help or hope for themselves. There are kids who can't attend school because they can't cross Dumont or go to Belmont because of the gang violence and territory issues that have poured out into the community from Rikers. The very gangs that were initiated in Rikers back in the 90s. The children are our future yet they are the ones that are losing. We

need to take that money that's being wasted on having innocent people detained pretrial without a conviction, and that money that's being wasted on the NYPD gang intelligence unit and instead use it for preventative programs by investing it in communities for schools, recreation centers, healing and restorative justice centers, credible messengers, Alternatives to incarceration, job training sites, medical facilities, housing, drop-in centers, programs for substance abuse users, mental health centers, growing gardens and anything else that fits the needs and betterment of the community.

These resources should also match those that will be provided in the community based facilities as well because when people are released we want them to be able to confidently retake their place in the community without them having to worry about the social factors they had to worry about prior to their arrest.

This is why we must ensure that these community based facilities are run and designed completely differently than Rikers or any other correctional facility in New York. We need to make sure that DOC is not a factor in the restoration and rebuilding of human beings because as we have seen for the past few decades they are part of the problem not the solution, and they too need some healing.