



# #CLOSErikers

BUILD COMMUNITIES

My name is Darren Mack. I was born and raised in Brooklyn, and now, am a resident of the Bronx. At the age of 17, I was arrested for being an accomplice to a robbery, charged as an adult, and incarcerated on Rikers Island. At that time, there were over 20,000 people detained on Rikers. Unlike today, there was no interest, no concern, and no media attention about the dehumanization and culture of violence that thousands of people like myself experienced on Torture Island. I served 19 months of hell on that penal colony. After serving 20 years from a 20-40 year sentence in prison, I returned home to the city that I love and found that the culture of violence and human rights violations on Rikers still remained. That is why I got involved with the campaign to close Rikers. Rikers is a human rights crisis. It is the Abu Ghraib of New York City. Closing it is urgent and cannot be delayed.

To enable the fastest possible closure of Rikers, I support the plan to go from 12 jails across our city down to 4 borough-based facilities unlike anything we've seen before, but with important conditions that will improve the plan.

The idea to shrink the system, decarcerate and put forth a justice reinvestment plan to build communities came from directly impacted people and we want to ensure our input is reflected from now through completion. This campaign in particular has gotten the furthest in securing closure of Rikers, but we recognize that people have worked for decades to close the Rikers Island jail complex, and many of those leaders are still in this fight. Thanks to their advocacy - denouncing racist policing and criminalization -- while New York has capacity to jail 15,000 people - those beds are not all filled. We must keep going.

The Mayor proposed a system that is smaller. He proposed to shrink the jail system from 15,000 beds to 6,000. With community input it has been reduced to 5,750. However, with the recent passage of new criminal justice reform legislation on the state level, that number can be lower. The continued work with our partner organizations on the state, city, and local level, demanding that the Mayor to reign in the NYPD to stop criminalizing people with mental health issues, feeding them into the pipeline to Rikers, and removing the hundreds of men, women, and young people with serious mental health issues on Rikers now, and into therapeutic settings, this borough based plan could can even be smaller. This, along with other reforms being passed and legislated right now, these facilities can be a maximum capacity of 3,000 beds, and designed in way that as the population drops it can be easily converted and used for something other than a space for detention.

The Mayor proposed a system that is safer. Conditions are important, but culture is equally important, because the culture of violence on Rikers is bred by its isolation on an island and decades of mismanagement by the Department of Corrections. Therefore, it is time to end the absolute and unfettered unaccountable power of DOC in these new facilities. If the design is going to be different, the management should be different. DOCS has been stubbornly unwilling and historically unable to manage Rikers safely. Therefore, their role and control should be diminished. Professional social workers, reentry specialists, transformative justice practitioners and the like should manage these facilities.

The Mayor proposed a system that is fairer. 89% of the people on Rikers are Black and Latino, and they come from neighborhoods like Brownsville and East New York which have been historically under-resourced. That's not fair. 300k to incarcerate a person on Rikers for 1 year, while community centers in communities of color and public libraries have closed due to lack of funding from the city. That's not fair. Crime in our city is at historic lows, but the NYPD budget is at historic highs of over 5 billion a year, and our schools have more cops than counselors. That's not fair. **Investments are choices and those choices have created a tale of two cities.**

Let's do something different. Our #buildCOMMUNITIES platform at [bit.ly/buildCOMMUNITIES](https://bit.ly/buildCOMMUNITIES) is calling for investments to housing, mental health services, and essential services that would divert people from going into the system in the first place. These investments in basic needs can be made right now on the front end. This plan has the potential to save our city 500 million dollars a year. The vocational, educational, and other stabilizing programs being proposed in these new facilities must also be created and funded to scale in currently under-resourced communities, outside of the carceral system. This would not just benefit some communities, but ultimately this benefits our entire city.

Our #buildCOMMUNITIES demands are comprehensive and they are the best thinking of directly impacted people including a variety of experts who have compiled the best solutions in public health, housing, violence prevention, transformative justice, education, restorative justice, and other necessary projects to heal our communities and ensure we can thrive. In order to one day get to a population of zero - we believe a new field that prioritizes these solutions must be funded to scale over several generations.

To seize this moment and finally end this moral stain on our city, I urge the board to vote yes but with the important conditions outlined by directly impacted leaders who have brought us closer than ever to closing Rikers.

Thank you!  
Darren Mack