

A MORE JUST NYC

Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform

Testimony of Colvin Grannum for City Council

September 5, 2019

My name is Colvin Grannum and I am here today to speak in support of closing Rikers and replacing it with a much smaller correction facility in each borough.

I am the president of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, the nation's first community development corporation. I am also a member of the Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform.

Many people jailed on Rikers come from the communities Bed-Stuy Restoration Corp serves. I have seen the profound toll that the Rikers jails take on the primarily African-American people who are incarcerated there.

Spending even a few days on Rikers can be devastating and can result in long-lasting mental, physical and financial harm across families. It also harms the correction officers who patrol the jails, many of whom also live in our communities. The stress and violence they experience does not stay contained within the walls of the jails, but ripples out to their families as well.

Deep changes to the criminal justice system are absolutely essential so that many fewer people are in jail in the first place.

But a much smaller borough based detention system is also necessary to put an end to Rikers. Better-designed facilities with designated space for programs and treatment can be safer for incarcerated people and correction officers. Proximity to the courthouses will facilitate timely and fair trials as well as visits from attorneys and loved ones, which are crucial to improving the chances of staying out of jail once released, and ultimately to improving public safety. This plan would ensure our city safely holds many fewer people in jail and thus would free up billions of dollars to invest in community infrastructure and services.

Your support of the City's plan, even as we work to improve it to address concerns raised by those who live near the proposed facilities, would send a powerful message to all New Yorkers that Rikers will be shut down and true criminal justice reform is on the horizon.

Thank you.