

A MORE JUST NYC

Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform

Testimony of Richard Aborn for City Council

September 5, 2019

Dear City Council Members,

My name is Richard Aborn and I support closing the Rikers jail complex and shifting to a borough-based detention system.

I am the President of the Citizens Crime Commission, a nonpartisan organization working to reduce crime and to improve the criminal justice system and the safety of New York City. I previously served as a prosecutor in Manhattan, where I prosecuted major felonies, including homicides. I am also a member of the Lippman Commission.

The jails on Rikers Island do not make our city safer. 80% of people in jail are held awaiting trial. No matter the charged offense, they deserve the presumption of innocence and to be treated humanely while incarcerated. This is not only a point of morality—it is also central to making New York City a safer place. The large majority of people who enter our city's jails return directly to our neighborhoods. Our detention system should equip them with the tools do so successfully. Rikers has the opposite effect.

New York City has made great progress in reducing the number of people in jail, and thanks to recent pretrial reform legislation in Albany, that trend will continue. But for the people who will still be held before trial, a modern system of borough facilities is a chance to connect people with important programs and services, giving them a better chance at reducing the risk of recidivism. Borough facilities will also facilitate more frequent visitation by family and friends, which is linked to improved behavior in jail and better outcomes when people re-enter society.

Shutting the Rikers jails and creating a much smaller, more humane system in the boroughs would be a monumental step forward for criminal justice, fairness and decency in New York City. I implore you to vote in support of that plan.

Thank you for considering my perspective.