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## **Independent Rikers Commission 2.0, Led by Former Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, Launches to Update and Enhance Roadmap to Close Rikers**

*Commission Will Design and Facilitate the Action Steps Necessary Across Sectors and Stakeholders to Ensure Rikers Closes*

New York, NY – The Independent Rikers Commission 2.0, chaired by former New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, is launching to update and enhance the plan to close the Rikers Island jails. Re-appointed by Council Speaker Adrienne Adams with the full support of New York City Mayor Eric Adams, the Commission’s goal is to lay out a refreshed blueprint of proven policies to help ensure the closure of Rikers, in the context of the changed realities of a post-COVID New York City and the law mandating closure by 2027. The Commission will work with community, criminal justice system, and government stakeholders alike to develop these enhanced plans and to facilitate their implementation.

The need to close the jails on Rikers could not be more urgent. New York City spends over \$1,200 per day to jail someone on Rikers. More than half — 54% — of people on Rikers have a mental illness. Nine out of 10 people on Rikers are pre-trial. On average, they – and crime victims – have been waiting for their day in court for 260 days. Nine out of 10 incarcerated people – and 9 out of 10 correctional officers – are Black or Latinx. Nine people in custody have died this year.

The Independent Rikers Commission enters this next phase with clear eyes as to the challenges and operational hurdles on the ground. These include an increased jail population, lengthier average jail stays, a rising number of incarcerated people with serious mental illness, and construction costs and delays.

The Commission will foster collaboration on necessary, safety-first solutions between the City and State, the courts, district attorneys, defense lawyers, medical providers, and other community and criminal justice stakeholders. The Commission is not starting from scratch. The Independent Rikers Commission’s [research, analysis, and policy development](#) have helped establish a strong foundation for a safer, more effective approach to crime, public safety, and incarceration.

“Rikers has to close as soon as possible. The jails there hurt public safety and endanger the lives of everyone inside their walls. They are a stain on the soul of our City,” said **Independent Rikers Commission Chair Former New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman**. “We have a generational opportunity to do far better, and the outlines of how to do so already exist. Steps like safe, smart reductions in the jail population, focused on people with serious mental illness and actually giving people speedy trials. Accelerated construction of borough-based jails and secure hospital beds. A new vision for corrections. At the same time, the goal of Commission 2.0 is to take a renewed and realistic look at current on-the-ground conditions and find a safe, clear path to swiftly close Rikers. We are committed with all our energies to answering that call from Speaker Adams and Mayor Adams. Success will take every level of government and strong

political will. But closing Rikers is urgent and essential for the well-being and long-term viability of our city. Together, we will make it happen!”

“Our administration supports closing Rikers Island under a plan that ensures the dignity, safety, and care for all justice-involved New Yorkers,” said **New York City Mayor Eric Adams**. “The COVID-19 pandemic had wide-ranging impacts on the criminal justice system and jail system in New York City — disrupting court operations, increasing the time to trial, and extending the length of stay for persons in custody — all of which has led to a substantial increase in the jail population on Rikers Island. The pandemic also caused significant issues and delays with the previous administration’s plans to issue requests for proposals and implement the design-phase of the borough-based jails plan, as well as brought construction projects to a halt while causing costs to skyrocket. Our administration’s commitment to the success of our jail system is unwavering, but we also have taken stock of the reality of how this once-in-a-generation pandemic impacted the original timeline for the implementation of the borough-based jail plan. The answer is not to ignore reality or compromise public safety, but to work together to find solutions. Understanding these goals, we applaud Judge Lippman and the Independent Commission on Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform for recognizing the need to reassess the current plan and offering to help develop new recommendations for how New York City can best move forward. The City fully supports the Commission’s work at this critical time, and we look forward to working with Speaker Adams and our colleagues on the City Council on this important mission.”

“I’m proud to reappoint a renewed Independent Rikers Commission that will bring stakeholders together towards getting the plan to close Rikers back on course and helping ensure it finally closes,” said **New York City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams**. “It is clear that Rikers is not serving New Yorkers and continues to undermine public safety in our city. Our commitment to meeting the legal mandate must be steadfast and will require the participation of all levels of government and parties involved in the criminal justice system. I look forward to the Commission's work with us all to ensure a safer New York City.”

The Independent Rikers Commission was initially established in 2016 by former Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito. The Independent Rikers Commission 2.0 will bolster its membership of civic leaders, public safety experts, and policymakers with new members and advisors representing the perspectives of crime victims, corrections and law enforcement, faith communities, city businesses, community-based safety programs, and human service non-profit organizations, among others.

Among other matters, the plan to close Rikers will have to include addressing the following:

- Over 1,200 people at Rikers have a severe mental illness, a number that has increased almost 50% in the past 20 months. People need access to stable treatment – outside the jail system.
- Criminal cases for people incarcerated in New York City take much longer to conclude than in the rest of the United States. These case delays artificially inflate the jail population, leave people languishing, make correction officers’ jobs harder, and keep

victims waiting for answers. The longer people stay in jail, the worse off they get. Solutions to address these chronic delays can lower the population and improve outcomes, without sacrificing public safety.

- The borough-based jails that will replace Rikers promise to be closer to courthouses and communities, with safer environments for incarcerated people and staff, and a focus on programming, rehabilitation, and re-entry that prioritizes the safety of neighborhoods. They are also delayed past the August 31, 2027 legal deadline to close Rikers, and the number of beds is in flux. Secure hospital-based treatment beds for people with serious health issues are also well behind schedule, and there will not be enough treatment beds to meet the needs of the jail population. All options to accelerate construction and ensure the system meets the needs of the incarcerated population must be considered.

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