

Dear Governor Hochul and Mayor de Blasio,

We write to express our alarm over your decision to involuntarily transfer women, transgender and non-binary people currently incarcerated at Rose M. Singer Center (RMSC) on Rikers Island to state prisons run by the state's Department of Correction and Community Supervision.

Rather than addressing the ongoing humanitarian crisis at Rikers through the only meaningful solution --by releasing people held pretrial -- your plan further marginalizes the incarcerated persons affected. It further isolates them from their families, attorneys and service-providers. RMSC is the facility for which advocates have received the fewest reports of acute crisis in recent months, and yet the rights of the people incarcerated there are being sacrificed in order to reassign a small number of officers to other facilities in a plan that will not ameliorate the ongoing emergency in any significant way.

Immediate action is required to address the horrors that incarcerated people currently face on Rikers Island, but that action cannot be one that compounds the isolation and trauma of those incarcerated. The incarcerated people directly impacted by this decision have been offered no choice in this plan nor were they, their families, advocates, DOC staff or service providers allowed to provide any feedback before it was hastily announced to the press. Those slated to be transferred are overwhelmingly people held pre-trial, and it is therefore vital and constitutionally-mandated that those currently incarcerated at RMSC have ongoing and unhindered access to defense counsel, social workers and other advocates working in their defense. Moving them miles from the city and its courts, into facilities designed for persons already convicted serving long-term sentences ensures that those transferred will have less ability to participate in their own defense and reduced access to justice.

During a visit to RSMC on October 18, Assemblymember Amanda Septimo spoke to dozens of those set to be transferred. They voiced their concern for their safety in prison; whether they would be able to receive medical care in prison given the facility does not accommodate telehealth visits; the lack of clarity they have been offered regarding this hastily organized plan; and the injustice of transferring people held pre-trial to prison. One woman asked Assemblymember Septimo: "Why us? We haven't been convicted. Why are we going to be treated like prisoners?" Another said: "This is showing that detention is a coercive weapon to squeeze out pleas. The Constitution is not optional, it applies to us."

We request that you listen to the voices of the affected persons themselves, 128 of whom have already signed a public letter and petition stating that they are "unequivocally opposed to this edict" and asking "How does making female detainees more isolated and less able to meet with counsel, court advocates, and visitors address the emergency?" This ill-conceived plan must be immediately halted before the harm these incarcerated people have already suffered is only further exacerbated.

We are horrified to learn that yet another person, Victor Mercado, has lost his life due to being incarcerated on Rikers Island on unaffordable bail. Pre-trial detention has become a death sentence. The only immediate and effective way for you to prevent further loss of lives is to take action to decarcerate now.

Sincerely,

Assemblymember Amanda Septimo

Senator Alessandra Biaggi

Senator Jabari Brisport

Senator Robert Jackson

Senator Jessica Ramos

Senator Julia Salazar

Assemblymember Khaleel Anderson

Assemblymember Kenny Burgos

Assemblymember Harvey Epstein

Assemblymember Emily Gallagher

Assemblymember Jessica González-Rojas

Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani

Assemblymember Marcela Mitaynes

Assemblymember Yuh-Line Niou

Assemblymember Dan Quart

Assemblymember Karines Reyes

Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal

Democratic Nominee for City Council Tiffany Cabán