



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

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**City Council Committee on Criminal Justice
Hearing on Intro 0549-2022 in relation to banning solitary confinement in city jails**

Thank you to Chair Rivera for the opportunity to speak today in support of ending solitary confinement in our city's jails. I want to thank you, Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, and Speaker Adams for bringing this issue forward.

You're going to hear it over and over today, but it can't be said enough: solitary confinement is torture, and it is long past time for us to ban it. Keeping people isolated exacerbates existing mental health issues and triggers new ones, including anxiety, depression, and psychosis. It has led people to self-harm, and tragically, to suicide. Five people have taken their own lives in city jails just this year. For those who do get out, studies have shown that having spent time in solitary increases the likelihood of death by suicide, homicide, and overdose, as well as recidivism.

My office hears often from New Yorkers who have loved ones in Rikers or other city jails, and they're scared. They've seen the news reports – detainees locked in shower stalls for hours, people with health conditions held in de-escalation units for much longer than allowed, forced to go without necessary medical care or prescriptions. Just this summer the Department of Corrections' oversight board found people being locked in solitary for 23 hours a day, in violation of State law. Often these are the same populations most at risk from confinement and isolation. It's part of a larger humanitarian crisis in our city's jails, and we need to fix it, now.

It's important to say that we can't just end solitary confinement by giving it a different name. Despite recent changes to State law and proposed City-level reforms, these abuses keep happening. "Decontamination showers," "de-escalation units," "structurally restrictive housing," whatever they call it, it all has to go.

We need to pass Intro 549 because it sets reasonable standards for out-of-cell time, legislates access to education and programming, limits the use of emergency lock-ins, and requires staff to be trained in de-escalation and conflict resolution. Also importantly, it requires detailed incident reporting that will create an accountability structure that is currently missing from the system. And finally, by allowing for separation without isolation in order to de-escalate violent or potentially violent situations, it will actually make our jails safer.

I also want to take this opportunity to state on the record that I am deeply concerned that we are not on track to close Rikers by 2027. We can and must pass this bill in order to address

immediate issues, but ultimately Rikers needs to be closed, and 2027 is a deadline that the administration should be taking more seriously. There is ample opportunity for the administration to be advancing common-sense solutions to reducing incarceration – like funding an expansion of the successful Brooklyn Felony Case Processing Pilot, establishing Population Review teams, utilizing the 6A program for people serving city sentences, and fully implementing the Points of Agreement on Closing Rikers, including 380 more units of Justice Involved Supportive Housing.

Thank you again for your time and for the Council’s strong advocacy on this effort. I also want to thank all the advocates, especially the folks who have experienced the horrors of solitary firsthand, for coming out today to share their experiences. I look forward to seeing this bill pass quickly, and you can count on me for any help you might need from Brooklyn.