

ISSUE BRIEF #2: THE EXISTING BOROUGH JAILS IN NYC ARE UNFIT FOR HUMANS

Aside from the 10 jails on Rikers, NYC operates 4 jails in the boroughs. While not as isolated, **all existing borough jails are as decrepit as the jails on Rikers. The City must not leave people detained in existing borough jail conditions** while we work toward eliminating all forms of confinement. Conditions of confinement matter.

The Vernon C Bain Correctional Center also known as “the Boat” is an 800-bed floating jail docked in Hunts Point in the Bronx. The City purchased The Boat in 1992 to expand jail capacity, and it [was supposed to be temporary](#).¹ While it is air-conditioned (when the ventilation system works), the only natural light comes through tiny portholes that cannot be opened, and there is little air flow. There was a Bronx House of Detention near the courthouse that was closed in 2000 and [later demolished](#) to build a shopping mall.² The planned Bronx borough jail would have about the same capacity as The Boat (886 beds).



“We were in a cargo hold of a slave ship — a modern -day slave ship owned by the City of New York.” Marvin Mayfield

The Manhattan Detention Complex (also known as The Tombs) is located next to the Manhattan Courthouse. It contains 898 jail beds³ and was opened - in its current form - [in 1983](#), though several previous iterations of jails and prisons existed in the same location.⁴ It lacks adequate personal space, program space, visiting space, and natural light. The planned Manhattan borough jail would have about the same capacity as The Tombs (886 beds).

“Everybody [in the Tombs] is so closed in. There’s no true ventilation in that facility. It contributes to a build-up of mold - our health was at risk.” Victor Herrera



The Brooklyn Detention Complex (also known as The Brooklyn House) is located next to the Brooklyn Courthouse. Built in 1957, it contains 759 jail beds. The cells there are so small that they do not meet State minimum standards. The planned Brooklyn borough jail would have a capacity slightly more than current the Brooklyn House (886 beds).

“Spent this afternoon at the boiling-hot Brooklyn House of Detention, touring as part of a surprise inspection w/staff from the Board of Corrections. Short story: Cruelly hot conditions, for the 450 detainees there (in pre-trial detention, remember), and for Corrections staff too.”
Council member Brad Lander⁷



The Queens House of Detention is located next to the Queens Courthouse and was built in 1961. It contains about 467 jail beds,⁸ but has been closed since 2002. It does not meet State minimum standards for square feet per person detained. The planned Queens borough jail would be the only one of the four borough facilities with a detention capacity (886 beds) significantly greater than the one it is replacing - while eliminating 14,700 jail beds on Rikers Island.

“The cells in there are so narrow and asphyxiating, it’s as if you were taken back in time.”
Angel Tueros



1 Haag, Matthew. A Floating Jail Was Supposed to Be Temporary. That Was 27 Years Ago. New York Times. October 10, 2019.
2 Bronx County Jail (demolished). The Living New Deal. Accessed October 28, 2020.
3 Department of Correction records.
4 The Tombs, Wikipedia. Accessed October 28, 2020.
5 ibid
6 Per statements by representatives of the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice.
7 July 21, 2019 Twitter post
8 Department of Correction records.