

## ISSUE BRIEF #4: RENOVATED BOROUGH FACILITIES - ALONG WITH ONGOING ORGANIZING - CAN REDUCE THE HARMS OF INCARCERATION

In October 2019, in response to years of organizing by formerly incarcerated people, the City Council passed a plan to permanently close all of the existing, decrepit jails in New York City (14 jails with approximately 17,500 beds) and establish a much smaller system of four borough-based jails with the capacity to detain no more than 3,300 people, while improving conditions of confinement for anyone who remains incarcerated. **This vote established the location and maximum size of four facilities, but not the design and operation of them - those we can and must still influence, and they must be shaped by the wisdom of people who have experienced incarceration.**

**The only clear result of stopping or stalling this existing plan (rather than improving or amending it) would be the continuation of old structures and systems of punishment and brutality - on Rikers, in the existing borough jails, and at the hands of the Department of Correction.** Anyone advocating to stop this plan must have a viable proposal to immediately end all incarceration in NYC jails.

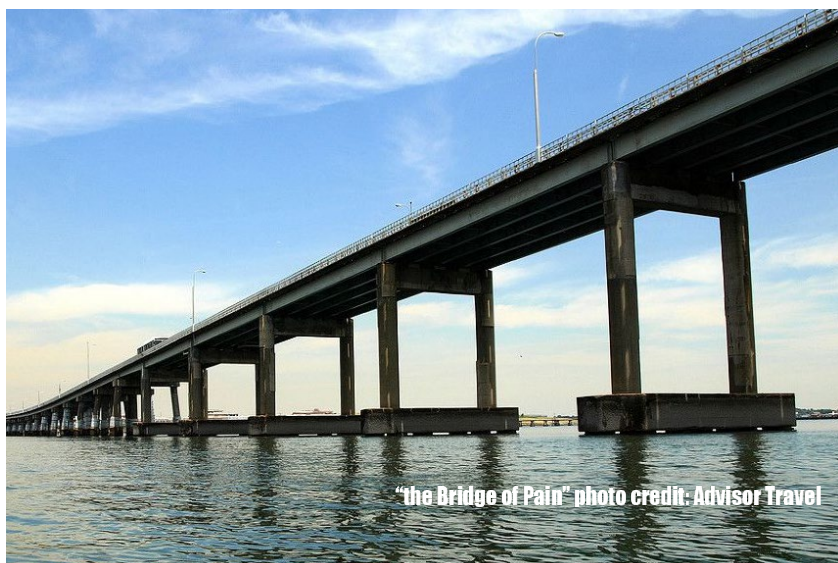
**The purpose of additional square footage in borough facilities is to substantially improve conditions, and will not create more detention capacity.** While the replacement facilities in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens would be significantly taller than the existing jails there, the additional additional square footage will create the space to meet or exceed the [new jail standards](#) passed in October 2019,<sup>1</sup> for more freedom of movement, and for better provision of services, to minimize the harm caused by incarceration. For example, in Manhattan, the detention capacity of the proposed facility is actually less than the facility it would replace - [the existing jail is 15 floors with about 898 beds](#), and the planned facility is 29 floors with 886 beds.<sup>2</sup>

**The current jails are made torturous both by their physical environment and by the way the Department of Corrections operates them.** The Department is a failed agency, and under a Federal Monitor, use of force by officers and [rates of violence have only increased](#).<sup>3</sup> It is time to disband the Department of Correction, which could be accomplished by amending the City Charter. The agency that replaces them must be one that does not create further harm when someone is detained, but is prepared to, and held accountable to, respond to the needs people may have while incarcerated. New York City must also [end solitary confinement](#) immediately.

**Even with improved conditions, use of these facilities should be the last resort.** New York City's jails have long functioned to strip people of their humanity along with their liberty. We will always fight to protect as many people as possible from incarceration, and yet, we recognize that judges will continue to hold and use the power to jail people. Adequate services must be provided to meet people's needs during any period of incarceration, including individualized healthcare, education, and re-entry services. We do not and will not accept that the replacement facilities will operate in the same way the Department of Corrections operates the current jails.

**People must also be provided much better access to voluntary services completely outside of the criminal legal system.** In the [Roadmap for Mental Health Resources and Diversion](#), and the [#buildCOMMUNITIES platform](#), New Yorkers laid out a vision for investments (in infrastructure, and programs) separate and in addition to replacement borough-based facilities.

**In order to ensure that both the design and operation of these facilities is vastly different from what currently exists, we must keep doing the work.** We must stay engaged and vigilant for the long haul - in any situation of confinement, even with the best design and better management, independent oversight and public accountability is essential.



1 Local Law 194, which requires at least 750 square feet per incarcerated person, and other improvements.  
 2 Hilburg, Jonathan. Manhattan's Notorious "Tombs" will close next month as part of Rikers realignment. ArchPaper. October 12, 2020.  
 3 Blau, Reuven and Grench, Eileen. Force Use Against Inmates Reached Record as COVID Hit New York City. The City. October 25, 2020.