

ISSUE BRIEF #7: ONLY CONTINUED ORGANIZING WILL GUARANTEE THE CLOSURE OF RIKERS



In October 2019, in response to years of organizing by people who have experienced Rikers Island, [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. In November 2020, [the City map was changed](#) to prohibit incarceration on Rikers after August 31, 2027.¹

Along with this plan, the City also committed to a set of [community investments](#)² that responded to some of [our demands](#), but represented just the beginning of what the City needs to do to repair the harm done to communities through decades of mass criminalization. [A trio of bills](#),³ also passed along with the plan, set new minimum standards for detention facilities, new reporting requirements, and established a commission on community reinvestment that will be made up primarily of people who have been impacted by incarceration.

This is a plan that directly impacted people shaped from the beginning - first by demanding that Mayor Bill de Blasio take swift action to close Rikers, when he was still set on “reforming” it. When the [first announcement](#) of the borough based jails plan was made, in February 2018,⁴ formerly incarcerated leaders engaged in scenario mapping guided by their experiences on Rikers Island and in other jails and prisons; by their commitment to getting as many people free as possible, as fast as possible; by their concerns about the conditions of confinement for anyone who is incarcerated; by their vision for a City and a world that invests in community resources - not law enforcement - to create safety and stability in communities; and by an analysis of the power we’ve built and the work still remaining. Those conversations led them to advocate for a plan that would reduce incarceration much further than the City had planned, do more to transform the way facilities are operated, and secure deep investment in our communities. **Through organizing, directly impacted advocates moved the City much closer to our plan, but the work is far from over.**

On the commitments the City has made - we must hold them accountable. That includes closing all of the jails on Rikers Island and the Boat by 2027 at the latest; reducing the number of people in jail to less than 3,300; reducing City jail capacity by at least 75% and ensuring improved conditions for anyone who is still incarcerated; and making investments in areas like supportive housing, mental health resources, and restorative justice.

Where the City has not met our demands, we must continue to organize and win. We are still fighting to free more people, to close Rikers faster, to pass the Renewable Rikers Act and begin repurposing parts of the island now, to end solitary confinement and all abuses in City jails, to divest from the Department of Correction, and to achieve reparative justice through deep investments in impacted communities, along the lines of those outlined in the [#buildCOMMUNITIES platform](#).

1 Rikers Island Public Place Mapping. ULURP # C200143MMY. The original date on the proposal (December 31, 2026) was changed due to the delays the Mayor attributed to Covid-19.

2 Borough-Based Jail Plan Points of Agreement. Office of the Mayor, City of New York. October 18, 2019.

3 Intros 1742, 1759, and 1762, voted on in October 17, 2019 Council Stated Meeting

4 Mayor de Blasio and City Council Reach Agreement to Replace Rikers Island Jails with Community-Based Facilities. February 14, 2018.