

A MORE JUST NYC

**Testimony of Zachary Katznelson, Policy Director
Independent Commission on NYC Criminal Justice and Incarceration
Reform
Before the New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice**

Oversight – Jail Violence
February 3, 2020

I am Zachary Katznelson, Policy Director of the Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform, sometimes known as the Lippman Commission after our chairperson Judge Jonathan Lippman. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

The profound failings of our City's jails are ones of accountability, organization, and management.

This not about resources. In the words of Commission member and former DOC Commissioner Michael Jacobson, DOC is “probably the most richly-resourced correctional system on the planet.” We estimate that the current ratio of uniformed staff to incarcerated people is an unheard of 1.7 to 1.

More and better training is always positive, but training is not the problem here either. As the *Nunez Monitor* has laid out, almost all staff have now received the training required to do their jobs and do them well. They simply are not using it.

Lives are at risk. The City must act, and act immediately.

Here are some places to start.

One, DOC should **consolidate operations to as few jails as possible as quickly as possible**. The more jails DOC operates, the more management teams it needs. The best people are spread too thin already, and moved around far too much. Let's have fewer jails and keep staff in one place.

Two, DOC should **immediately analyze staffing in every unit**. There is no justification for having a single officer alone in a housing unit with two dozen people while six other officers stand around in a hallway nearby, something I have seen repeatedly at Rikers and other City jails.

Three, because rapport among staff and with incarcerated people is critical, DOC must **ensure that supervisors and officers are assigned to steady posts and actually work those posts**. DOC should build teams of line staff and supervisors who know each other, can depend on each other, and hold each other accountable.

Four, **involve line staff and Captains in reform efforts**. They surely have some good ideas about how to change things.

Five, the Department should **publicly celebrate staff who help counteract violence**.

Six, supervisors must be held accountable for their failure to effectively manage, supervise, coach, or discipline line staff. **Supervisors who fail should not be promoted or given plum assignments**.

Seven, DOC must **limit the use of Probe Teams**, which are basically riot squads in the jails. The *Nunez* Monitor found they are called far too often and frequently exacerbate violence.

A couple other ideas:

Consider basing **DOC leadership in the jails, not in Bulova**.

And what about adding **violence interrupters to each unit of every jail**?

Finally, this is not just on the Department of Correction.

People accused of parole violations now make up over a quarter of the people in Rikers. The City should be putting tremendous pressure on state authorities to stop jailing people on parole far too often for far too little.

And as the *Nunez* Monitor has explained, there is a strong link between the length of time someone is incarcerated and the likelihood that person will be involved in jail violence. Yet people languish for years before trial. Faster resolution of cases has to be a priority for judges, district attorneys and defenders.

This is all just a start, but we need to get going immediately. Thank you.