



‘It Makes Me Want to Cry’: Visiting Rikers Island

NYC Jails Action Coalition
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JAC is a coalition of activists that includes formerly incarcerated and currently incarcerated people, their family members, and other community members who are working to promote human rights, dignity, and safety for people in New York City jails. For more information about JAC, visit www.nycjac.org.

‘IT MAKES ME WANT TO CRY’: VISITING RIKERS ISLAND

Introduction

Visits are important for the well-being of incarcerated people. Visits decrease the chance of recidivism;^{1,2} may help improve reentry experiences;^{3,4} can improve family relationships during incarceration and upon reentry, especially relationships with children;^{5,6} and can increase prison safety.⁷ In addition, visiting preserves the right of family members to have a relationship with their loved ones, and may even prevent health problems that can result from long-term separation from an incarcerated family member.⁸

The Board of Correction Minimum Standards protect the right for people incarcerated in the New York City jails to have visits from family and friends.⁹ An average of 1000 people visit Rikers Island every day—up to 1500 on the busiest visit days—and about 30,000 children visit Rikers every year.¹⁰ In May 2015, the Department of Correction (DOC) proposed rolling back these visit protections by limiting physical contact during visits and denying whole classes of people the right to visit.¹¹ The NYC Jails Action Coalition (JAC) galvanized community members to oppose these changes. Thirty-five people testified at the Board of Correction’s hearing on the proposed rule changes, and over 85 organizations and 54 individuals submitted or signed on to written comments. The Board ultimately rejected the DOC’s most severe restrictions and reaffirmed the significance of visits, stating:

Maintaining personal connections with social and family networks and support systems is critical to improving outcomes both during confinement and upon reentry. Visitation with friends and family plays an instrumental role in an inmate’s ability to maintain these connections and should therefore be encouraged and facilitated by the Department.¹²

Yet the conditions for visitors continue to be discouraging at best and traumatizing and violent at worst. Visitors, who many times have small children with them, wait for hours; undergo multiple searches; submit to strict and inconsistent dress code enforcement; are forced to miss work or school; are treated with disrespect; and have even experienced sexual harassment and abuse in order to spend just one hour with their incarcerated loved one. DOC has achieved its goal of restricting contact during visits by redesigning visit rooms so that people sit at long,

circuitous tables with six inch Plexiglas partitions—and it continues to maintain a harsh, difficult, discouraging and time-consuming visiting process.

The Jails Action Coalition has launched a campaign that seeks to learn more about the experience of families and friends who visit Rikers Island. Over the course of 2017, JAC members conducted outreach at the Q100 bus stop in Queens Plaza, and interviewed friends and family who were traveling to Rikers Island to visit their incarcerated loved ones. We spoke to over 100 visitors, a majority of whom were women, and completed over 50 surveys. From this outreach, we learned about the barriers visitors face and gathered recommendations about how the visiting process could be improved. We also heard from an attorney who currently represents at least 45 visitors who report being sexually abused by DOC staff during the visit process.

This report documents our findings and includes recommendations for improving the visit process. **Section I**, “The Importance of Visits,” highlights how crucial visits are to the experience of incarcerated people and their families and friends. **Section II**, “Visiting Rikers,” describes the experience of visiting from the perspective of those who visit. **Section III** details the findings of our outreach and research. And **Section IV** outlines recommendations for the Department of Correction, the Board of Correction and the City to adopt in order to improve the experience of family members and friends who visit their loved ones at Rikers.

Section I: The Importance of Visits

Visits from family and friends can serve to keep incarcerated individuals connected to their communities and lives outside of the jail’s walls. Visiting allows family members, including children, to maintain relationships with their loved ones, and can help those who are incarcerated remain hopeful.

Reentry and recidivism

Visits also play a vital role in successful reentry. A 2011 study of 16,420 people who were incarcerated in Minnesota prisons between 2003 and 2007 found that being visited while in prison significantly reduced recidivism in the years following the person’s release.¹³ Many studies over decades have focused on this topic.¹⁴ Visits from friends, family, and others such as clergy members and mentors allow incarcerated people to

create, retain, and strengthen their social supports, which is a key factor in preventing recidivism, and can significantly improve a person's transition to the community after incarceration.¹⁵ People with strong social ties are also more likely to find employment upon their release.¹⁶ Promoting strong family bonds through visits can reduce recidivism as most post-release support, including cash assistance, a place to stay, and job prospects, is provided by family members.¹⁷

Mental health

Visits support individuals' mental health while they are incarcerated. Studies have shown, for example, that youth who receive visits from their parents while incarcerated report fewer depressive symptoms over time compared to those who do not receive visits.¹⁸ Similarly, incarcerated mothers who receive fewer visits from their children show more depressive symptoms than those who receive more visits.¹⁹ Clearly, regular visits can have a profound positive effect on the mental health of those incarcerated.

Jail safety

People who are visited by loved ones consistently throughout their incarceration engage in less "misconduct" while in jail,²⁰ which can lead to safer conditions for incarcerated individuals and correction staff. Visits can also help incarcerated people cope with conditions that lead to violence; for example, incarcerated people who receive visits perceive issues like overcrowding as less oppressive, which can reduce the likelihood of violent behavior.²¹ While the timing and frequency of visits is important when examining their effect on incidents of misconduct or violence,²² visits should be supported and encouraged as much as possible because of their potential positive effect on jail safety.

Impact on families

Family members have a right to safely visit their loved ones, and children have a right to maintain a relationship with their incarcerated parent. Relationships between incarcerated people and their family members, and particularly their children, can be strengthened by increased contact during incarceration²³—although the quality of the visiting environment may affect children's visiting experiences.^{24,25} One study found that barriers to visiting were strongly related to decreases in the quality of family relationships post-release.²⁶ In an in-depth study on the impact of incarceration on family members of incarcerated individuals, family members who were unable to talk to or visit their loved ones regularly were more likely to self-report that their incarceration caused negative impacts on their health.²⁷

Section II: Visiting Rikers Island

Family members and friends who wish to visit their incarcerated loved ones must first make their way to a Q100 bus stop in Queens. The ride from Queens Plaza, where the Q100 originates, takes about 30 minutes. When visitors arrive on Rikers, one or two correction officers (COs) board the bus and announce that all contraband must be left on the bus and that visitors will be required to line up single file when exiting. Visitors are also required to show identification to exit. Visitors are brought inside the Samuel L. Perry Center and instructed to stand in a circle with hats off and all bags held to their sides. A dog is then led around the circle twice. Visitors are then told to exit and head toward the first set of lockers outside of the Central Visit House. There are no clear signs instructing people what they should leave in the lockers. Visitors are required to bring quarters to operate the lockers, and many visitors need to borrow quarters from others, especially if it is their first time visiting and they were not aware they would need them. Many times lockers are broken and will not work or return the quarter. After putting their belongings in a locker, visitors are asked to show their identification again to a CO before proceeding inside the Central Visit House, where they go through the first metal detector search.

Once they have passed through the metal detector, visitors disperse to different waiting areas depending on which facility they are visiting. Once visitors make their way to the correct waiting area, they must check in with a CO and provide their identification as well the book and case number of the person they are visiting. They are also asked to provide their fingerprints. While this is not required, COs do not tell visitors they have a choice, nor are there signs that inform visitors of their right to refuse to be fingerprinted.

From there, visitors wait for another bus to take them from the waiting area to the jail facility they are visiting. They must sometimes wait over half an hour for the next bus to arrive. While waiting for the second bus, visitors are sometimes randomly chosen to leave the visit area and go through an ion scan for drug residue. If the test comes up negative, visitors can go back to the previous area to wait for the bus, although they may have missed the bus and have to wait even longer. Once at the jail facility, visitors must remove their shoes and pass through another metal detector. Once they have cleared the second metal detector, they must leave all their belongings, including their outer layers of clothing, in a second locker, which also requires a quarter. Visitors then enter a small room where they are subjected to yet another body search, this time with a

hand-held metal detector. In some facilities on Rikers, this last body search requires that two or three visitors at a time lift their shirts, exposing their stomach; shake out their bra; open their pants zipper and expose their underwear; flip out the waistband of their pants; and turn around to show their bare back. Visitors are then requested to lower their socks below their ankles, lift their sleeves up to their elbows, open their mouths and stick their tongues out.

Finally, visitors are allowed to enter a waiting room where they wait, sometimes for hours, until their loved one is called to the visiting floor. These waiting rooms are cold, even in the summer, and if a visitor leaves to use the restroom they are denied their visit. Visits last one hour, the room is often extremely loud, and it is often difficult for visitors and their loved ones to hear each other. After the visit, visitors must wait again for a bus to pick them up and take them back to the Perry Center, where they wait again for the Q100 to take them off the Island.

Section III: What Visitors Say About Visiting

Visiting a person incarcerated at Rikers is a challenge for families and friends. They must set aside a whole day to spend only one hour with their loved ones and endure the arduous visit process described above. Visitors sometimes must even put their personal safety at risk. Through conducting outreach to visitors at the Q100 bus stop, and collecting first- and second- hand accounts of people's visiting experiences, JAC has compiled some of the most egregious and frequently raised complaints. These concerns and abuses create barriers to successful visits and must be addressed.

The barriers include:

- The risk of sexual abuse during unlawful strip searches;
- Other inappropriate behavior by COs;
- Vague and inconsistently enforced policies;
- Long commutes to the island;
- Long wait times and excessive searches; and
- An unwelcoming and uncomfortable physical environment.

Sexual abuse of visitors

The DOC prohibits strip searches and cavity searches of visitors to city jails, and yet many visitors, most of whom are women, have reported being searched in a way that constitutes sexual abuse by COs.²⁸ Women and men have reported being forced to strip down to their underwear, show COs their genitals, suffer through inappropriate touching of their breasts and genitals, and undergo cavity searches—even though these searches

are directly in violation of DOC policy.²⁹ As of November 2017, at least 45 women have filed or are in the process of filing lawsuits that accuse the DOC of unlawful strip searches, most of them at Rikers.³⁰ According to an attorney representing the plaintiffs, these strip searches are still happening, and they are now being conducted in bathrooms in the Central Visit House, out of sight from surveillance cameras. He also shared that one of the officers who was accused of sexual abuse has been promoted to the DOC Investigations team. Our outreach at the Q100 bus stop also confirmed that officers conduct illegal strip searches on visitors. One visitor said she felt violated during searches because they sometimes includes officers “touching her privates.”

Treatment of visitors

Many visitors report that COs' behavior as a major concern and hindrance during visits. More than 50% of surveyed visitors noted the need for improvement in the way that COs treat visitors. Many visitors reported that they were treated as though they had committed a crime or were incarcerated themselves—a phenomenon that has been called “secondary prisonization.”³¹ One visitor said, “They treat me like I'm my husband, like the one that we go see.”

**“It makes me want to cry.
It's a very cold experience.”**

While a few visitors reported that certain COs are nice and helpful, visitors more consistently reported that COs are “disrespectful and rude” and that COs often “talk nasty” to them and “aren't understanding of what visitors go through.” One visitor shared that she witnessed a CO tell another visitor with her baby that her loved one was “probably crying and masturbating waiting for her.” Another visitor said that COs “pick on people and treat them like animals” and “poke at inmates for a reaction.” One 43-year-old visitor who visits her boyfriend weekly said, “It makes me want to cry. It's a very cold experience.”

Even when searches do not end in sexual abuse, they are invasive. One visitor described them as an “assault on privacy.” “I felt violated because they've asked me to show my underwear not only in front of officers but in front of other visitors,” she shared. “They search children's diapers. They would do more to my daughter—she is young and pretty, you would see the difference in treatment and she would get searched more and harassed.”

Vague and inconsistent policies

Visitors are often subjected to the whims of COs. One

visitor said that rules are “made up by each officer according to their moods and power trips” and they use their power in “a very nasty and corrupted way.” For example, the Minimum Standards clearly state that visits are a minimum of one hour, and that attorney visits do not count towards the maximum number of visits that an incarcerated individual is allowed. And yet, visitors we spoke to reported visits that lasted less than an hour or were denied completely because they were told that an attorney took the incarcerated person’s last visit. The Minimum Standards also allow for longer visits for special circumstances such as additional travel time required by the visitor, and yet we heard reports that this rule was not being honored for visitors coming from out of state.³²

“How do you visit and talk about things if you know there will be repercussions for talking about certain things? If you talk about how the guards are mistreating you in front of the guards, they are going to mistreat you. How do you find out if someone’s okay?”

Some visitors we spoke to complained that officers seemingly make up their own rules regarding what color or type of clothes visitors can wear. One visitor reported being denied his visit because he was wearing “gang colors.” “I wasn’t offered any other clothing, they wouldn’t even let me turn my shirt inside out. They just said ‘hey, you have to go,’” he said. The DOC’s policy specifically allows for visits to continue if the dress code is violated as long as the visitor agrees to wear a Department-issued cover-up.³³ The same visitor reported that on another occasion COs listened to his visit with his incarcerated friend, even though it is in direct violation of the Minimum Standards for COs to monitor visits without a warrant.³⁴ He was asked to leave when he confronted the officer about listening to the conversation. Visit areas are so loud that often visitors are forced to shout to be heard by their loved one, which makes it even more difficult to have a private conversation. “The whole process is invasive even when the invasive part is over,” he shared. “How do you visit and talk about things if you know there will be repercussions for talking about certain things? If you talk about how the guards are mistreating you in front of the guards, they are going to mistreat you. How do you find out if someone’s okay?”

One visitor shared that she would watch some visitors be waved through without being searched, and felt that these visitors were being given special treatment. “When I asked why, the COs told me to shut up. What else would they be doing other than bringing in contraband?”

Excessive searches and long wait times

Families sacrifice entire days in order to see their loved one for just one hour when they visit Rikers. Studies show that visiting is very often a financial burden, because taking time off work, obtaining childcare, and the transportation costs associated with visiting can add to the debt caused by loss of the incarcerated family member’s income and legal fees that many families face when a family member is incarcerated.³⁵ In addition, visitors must accommodate the visit schedule: Only Fridays are open to all visitors regardless of their loved one’s last name; four days a week, visits are restricted by last name; and two days a week there are no visits at all.³⁶ All too often, visitors get all the way to the island only to find that their loved one’s building is on lockdown, which means there is no movement allowed within the jail and they aren’t able to visit that day.

One visitor said that it seems like long waits happen because COs just “sit, talk and make you wait.” Another lives near Rikers, but when she visits it still takes up a big part of her day—she says that if she gets there at 2:00 p.m. she won’t leave until 10:00 p.m. or later. Another visitor reported waiting until 10:00 a.m. to be processed even though visits start at 8:00 a.m. because the CO didn’t arrive until 9:00 a.m. One visitor said that “after I visited the first time, I knew it was gonna be a whole day no matter what.”

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Excessive searches certainly exacerbate long wait times for visitors. In July 2015, then-Commissioner Ponte acknowledged that multiple searches were problematic and agreed to consider changes in the search process. He also agreed that wait times should be reduced. Instead, DOC added an additional search in which visitors are subjected to passive canine inspection. Visitors complain that the number of searches does not make sense, especially if they are having a non-contact visit. One visitor described it this way: There are “searches, again, again, again, again, five times.”

DOC insists on multiple searches in order to prevent contraband from entering Rikers. Yet the Board of Correction’s 2015 report *Violence in New York City Jails*:

Slashing and Stabbing Incidents found that nearly 80% of weapons recovered in 2014 were fashioned from items found or used in the jails, and only 10% were likely introduced from the outside.³⁷ A New York City Department of Investigation report from 2014 found that a large portion of the illegal trafficking of contraband is carried out by uniformed guards and civilian employees.³⁸ Given the reality of how contraband enters Rikers, the number of searches is excessive and unnecessary.

There are “searches, again, again, again, again, five times.”

Another visitor complained that random drug searches are unfair and cause extra delays. “Sometimes you’ll get pulled out of the waiting room for a random drug search and then you lose your place in line. Just because you maybe came in contact with drugs doesn’t mean you shouldn’t get a visit. Say a visitor is a drug addict, so because you’re a drug addict you shouldn’t have a visit?”

Although repetitive searches and processing times make waits longer, the physical location of Rikers is a big part of the problem. Visitors must rely on just one bus line to get to and from the island, which can add hours to their commute.³⁹ The inaccessibility of Rikers takes its toll on visiting: In 2017, the visit rate at Rikers was roughly half that of NYC’s borough jail facilities.⁴⁰

Physical environment

The physical environment at Rikers plays an important role in the experience of visits. Visiting areas are dirty and uncomfortable, and are often cold, loud and chaotic. Visitors have complained that the water from the water fountains comes out rusty—a direct violation of the Minimum Standards, which require drinking fountains be available to visitors.⁴¹ Once visitors get to the jail facility where they wait for their visit, they are not allowed to use the restroom or else their visit will be denied. Visit areas are cold, even in the summer, and visitors are not allowed to wear any outer layers. The only food available to visitors is through the vending machines in the Central Visit House, and food is not allowed in the visiting areas of jail facilities, so visitors often wait for hours without access to food or restrooms.

One of the most frequently cited problems among visitors with children is that there is no space for children to play; long wait times make visiting even more difficult for families with small children. In 2015, the BOC approved six-inch high partitions in the center of visit tables between visitors and their incarcerated loved one.⁴² DOC also modified visit rooms to have one long circuitous table with seats on one side for visitors

and seats on the other side for the person being visited. Visitors complain that the long tables make for a much less intimate visiting experience than smaller tables. The design is also extremely problematic for visiting children. Under the Board standards, incarcerated individuals are permitted to hold children in their family who are age 14 and younger.⁴³ For a child to be able to sit with their incarcerated family member as permitted by the Standard, they have to walk all the way around the long circuitous table, through other people’s visits.⁴⁴ Families are generally discouraged from leaving their seats, adding another barrier for children to sit on their incarcerated parent’s lap. JAC indicated to the Board that this new infrastructure would be problematic for children, yet no accommodation was made.

For those families and incarcerated individuals who are denied a contact visit, visits occur inside a booth with the incarcerated person on one side of a Plexiglas divider and the visitor on the other side. People have reported that communication is difficult because there are no phones to use to speak to each other through the glass. Visitors and incarcerated people are forced to raise their voices to make themselves heard, which contributes to the noise and chaos of the visiting environment. In some facilities the Plexiglas is so scratched and dirty that it is difficult to see through. One visitor said, “You have to mime what you are saying. And other families are trying to talk and everyone’s screaming.” Non-contact visits can be emotionally difficult for families, especially for those with young children who become distressed at not being allowed to touch their incarcerated parent.⁴⁵

“You have to mime what you are saying. And other families are trying to talk and everyone’s screaming.”

Despite these hardships, visitors consistently affirm the importance of visiting for themselves and their incarcerated loved one. One 24-year-old visitor shared, “[Visiting] makes my son’s father’s day. I’m the only one who visits him. It makes his time go faster. Visits make my day as well. My son loves to go, he says ‘daddy’ as we cross the bridge.” A mother who visits her incarcerated son said, “I look forward to visits. I feel better when I see him. [It] feels good to know he is in good health and good spirits.” Visitors put up with the arduous and at times dangerous process of visiting because they are dedicated to seeing their loved ones. The DOC, the Board, and the City should be supporting visitors, not disuading them.

Section IV: Recommendations

Visiting is a crucial component of improving reentry and decreasing recidivism, improving jail safety and the mental health of incarcerated people, and helping families who deal with the collateral consequences of incarceration to maintain ties with their loved ones. We have outlined our major concerns with the experience of visiting and highlighted the voices of visitors. Below, we detail recommendations for the Department of Correction, the Board of Correction, and the Mayor's office. If followed, these recommendations will greatly improve the experience of visiting and will support a healthy and safe visiting process for incarcerated people and their family and friends who visit.

Recommendations: Department of Correction

1. Preventing sexual abuse

No one should have to suffer unlawful searches and sexual abuse in order to visit their incarcerated loved ones. DOC must take these allegations seriously and take action immediately to keep them from happening. DOC should:

- Launch an independent and transparent investigation into the allegations of sexual abuse during unlawful strip searches.
- Ensure supervisors make rounds during visit hours to ensure that DOC's policies regarding searches are followed.⁴⁶
- Ensure that when pat-frisk searches of visitors do occur, supervisors are present to oversee the search.
- Periodically re-train correction officers on DOC's search policies and how to do a proper search.
- Immediately transfer any staff member from their visit post if there is a complaint that the staff member has conducted an improper search.
- Immediately transfer any staff member from their visit post when it has been determined that a staff member has used undesignated search areas such as bathrooms to conduct searches.
- Provide visitors who are subjected to pat-frisk searches with a card that includes the searching correction officer's name, badge number, an explanation of the visitor's rights, and a description of how to make a complaint.
- Hang signs in visit areas with a phone number visitors can call to report sexual abuse. Consider including the NYPD Special Victims Unit hotline number.
- Track and publish quarterly numbers of sexual abuse complaints by visitors, including the following information:

1. Facility;
2. Demographics (gender, race, and age);
3. Category (abusive pat frisk, strip search, sexual abuse⁴⁷);
4. Number of investigatory days complaints have been pending;
5. Closing rates;
6. Category of alleged perpetrator (correction officer, captain, other DOC staff);
7. Substantiation rates; and
8. Administrative actions taken against staff.

2. The experience of visiting

Visiting is important to the wellbeing of both incarcerated people and their family and friends. DOC should support visitors to have the best visit possible and eliminate the barriers to safe, efficient and meaningful visits. DOC should:

- Create child-friendly visiting areas so that (a) visiting children and their caretakers have a place to comfortably wait for their visit and (b) incarcerated parents can interact with their children in a family-like environment that promotes connection. Children should be provided with crayons, books, toys, etc.
- Improve the physical environment of visiting areas, including bathroom facilities, drinking fountains, and seating; ensure visiting areas are warmer.
- Allow visitors to use the restroom while they are waiting for their loved one to be called to the visit floor without losing their visit.
- Install smaller visit tables and remove 6-inch Plexiglas dividers to allow for a more private and intimate visiting experience.
- Replace Plexiglas in booth visit areas and install phones so that visitors can hear their loved ones.
- Ensure that correction officers adhere to DOC policy regarding monitoring of conversations between visitors and their incarcerated loved ones.
- Add more busses from the Central Visit House to jail facilities (as well as more bus drivers) and implement a set bus schedule in order to cut down on wait times for visitors.
- Eliminate the canine search and reduce searches so that visitors are only searched once.
- Eliminate random ion scan drug searches as they too frequently lead to false positives and unnecessarily delay visits.
- Consider increasing searches for correction officers and/or enforce searching correction officers to cut down on contraband entering Rikers.
- Prioritize shortening wait times for visitors.
- Develop and publicize a notification system (such as

a call-in line, Twitter page, or updated web page) so that visitors are notified of lockdowns before they arrive on Rikers.

- Update website consistently with visiting rules. Ensure correction officers consistently follow every rule posted on the website.
- Publish the existing Visitor's Guide and post a link to download it on the DOC visiting website. Provide paper copies to visitors when they arrive at Rikers.
- Enforce consistently policies that require DOC to provide clothing to visitors who do not meet dress code rules. DOC should provide both shirts as currently practiced, as well as sweatpants if needed. Visitors should not be turned away for wearing certain colors.
- Lengthen visits from one hour to two or three hours, extend visiting hours, and add two more visit days so that visitors can visit seven days a week.
- Hang posters informing visitors of their rights in visit areas, and include information about how to contact the Board when rights are violated.
- Launch a PSA campaign to inform visitors of their rights when they visit Rikers, including signs and an informational recording that plays on the Q100 so that visitors are informed of their rights before reaching Rikers.
- Collect information on how long each visitor must wait before seeing their loved one and report this data to the Board monthly.

3. Programming and oversight

DOC should make some systemic changes in order to improve visits overall:

- Investigate correction officers who work in visit areas for gang activity.
- Promote and encourage visits for people who do not receive regular visits.
- Continue working on the plan underway to promote events to encourage children to visit their mothers held at Rikers.
- Get input from family members who visit on visit policies and practices.
- Provide better training for correction officers so they are more prepared to deal compassionately with the issues that visitors face.
- Revitalize the Visit Working Group, including adding more members.
- Discontinue the use of non-contact visits as punishment for small infractions by incarcerated individuals.
- Do not allow COs to work double shifts; exhausted COs do not contribute to a positive visiting environment.

- Do not at any point replace in-person visits with video visiting. If video visiting is implemented, it should be available as a supplement to in-person visits only and it should be available at no cost.

Recommendations: Board of Correction

1. Compliance monitoring

The Board should focus on monitoring current rules regarding visits. The Board should:

- Ensure COs are properly conducting searches, and that unlawful strip searches are not happening, by sending BOC staff to monitor visit areas.
- Test water fountains and monitor restrooms for functionality, cleanliness, and refilled toilet paper and soap.
- Ensure that visitors who do not comply with DOC dress code are offered clothing alternatives and are not turned away from visits unless they do not consent to wearing clothing alternatives.
- Ensure COs are not monitoring conversations between family and friends and their incarcerated loved ones without a warrant.
- Require that DOC staff inform visitors of their right not to be fingerprinted when being checked in at the Central Visit House.
- Require DOC to provide opportunities for child-parent contact in visit areas.

2. Rulemaking

The Board should engage in rulemaking to improve the quality of visits and take the opportunity to hear from visitors on what would make the visiting experience better. In particular, the Board should:

- Expand the Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment Minimum Standards to include rules about visits.
- Require visits be longer than one hour.
- Require DOC to track and report wait times for each stage of the visiting process, as well as document search procedures for each visitor.
- Require DOC to provide notice to visitors of any lockdowns occurring on a particular day so that visitors can check ahead of time before traveling to Rikers.
- Require DOC to post visit rules and visitors' rights and the Board's contact information in visible places in visit areas.
- Require DOC to provide a card with the searching CO's information, the visitor's rights regarding searches and the Board's contact information each time a pat-frisk search is performed.

- Eliminate the rule which allows for a 6-inch Plexiglas divider at visit tables.
- Allow for more contact during visits.
- Limit the number of searches to which visitors are subjected, including eliminating the canine search and random ion scans.

Recommendations: Mayor's Office

As the plan for closing Rikers moves forward and plans for new jails begin, the City should consider the issues visitors have faced at Rikers and thoughtfully plan to

build new visit areas and implement visit policies that reflect the needs of visitors and their incarcerated loved ones. In particular, the City should:

- Make visit areas accessible by multiple forms of transportation.
- Build comfortable and child-friendly visiting areas.
- Require only one search for visitors.
- Provide extensive visit hours 7 days a week.
- Create multiple ways for visitors to learn about their rights and DOC rules, including clear signage in visit facilities.

Endnotes

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