



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION
Vincent Schiraldi, Commissioner
Office of the Commissioner
75-20 Astoria Boulevard, Suite 305
East Elmhurst, New York. 11370

718 • 546 • 0890
Fax 718 • 278 • 6022

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I write to inform you of an emerging COVID-19 crisis at Rikers Island. While much of New York City may be spared the worst possible impacts of the Omicron variant due to relatively high vaccination rates, only 45% of our incarcerated population has received one shot of the vaccine, and only 38% is fully vaccinated. Until ten days ago, for the past several months our COVID positivity rate was consistently hovering at approximately 1%. Yesterday it was 9.5%. Today it is over 17%.

The combination of these data indicates that the risks to the human beings in our custody are at a crisis level. As you are aware, considerable efforts were made at the beginning of the pandemic to reduce the jail population immediately in order to avert a major humanitarian catastrophe. All indications suggest that our jail population faces an equal or greater level of risk from COVID now as it did at the start of the pandemic.

We are doing what we can to limit the spread of Omicron. Sadly, that includes the suspension of congregate services and in-person visitation, additional movement protocols for individuals who may have been exposed to COVID, and reductions in programming. These measures will have considerable negative effects on a jail population that is still reeling from two years of COVID and a staffing crisis that has contributed to unprecedented levels of tension, anxiety, and violence within the jails. The consequences of removing these basic services and supports from those in our custody will be felt by both persons in custody and the officers who work hard every day to keep people here safe. We believe we have no choice.

I implore you to ask the courts to similarly consider every available option to reduce the number of individuals in our jail. Whether that means seeking supervised release in more cases or identifying cases that can be resolved with modifications to sentence length or requesting compassionate release for individuals who are at higher risk due to underlying medical conditions, I leave to your professional judgment.

My staff and I are happy to provide any assistance we can to identify those individuals and facilitate a speedy resolution of their cases. If you have any questions about the circumstances we are facing, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Vincent Schiraldi".

Commissioner Vincent Schiraldi