Dear Executive Directors of the Board of Elections in the City of New York:

This letter is in response to previous correspondence between our offices about expanding access to voting in Rikers Island facilities. In the past, the Department of Corrections has reached out about establishing an election day polling place in the facilities on Rikers Island. The current procedure for those detained on Rikers Island to vote relies on New York’s absentee process and leaves many detained people without the option to cast their ballot.

There is a need for a more comprehensive approach to voting in all New York City Jails, and particularly on Rikers Island where more than 93 percent of the population is held there pretrial or awaiting a parole hearing, and thus remain eligible to vote. Among the 4 percent of the population who are sentenced, many are serving time for a misdemeanor, and also eligible to vote. The Department of Corrections urges the Board of Elections to establish at least one early voting location on Rikers Island. If a universal early voting site is not possible, the Board of Elections should establish in person absentee voting at Rikers Island, as is currently provided within each borough’s Board of Elections offices.

New York law emphasizes that all voters enjoy equal access to early voting locations. The Law states that “Polling places for early voting shall be located so that voters in the county have adequate and equitable access.” The law further states that “all voters in each county shall have one or more polling places at which they are eligible to vote throughout the early voting period on a substantially equal basis.” Despite this legal mandate, those detained on Rikers effectively do not have access to any early voting site. The lack of early voting options prevents detainees from being treated the same as every other New Yorker, leaving thousands of eligible voters without the option to vote early-- the only option to vote in person for those currently in jail.

New Yorkers who are currently detained and awaiting trial or serving time for a misdemeanor have a legal right to vote, but the Department of Corrections reliance on absentee voting leaves a window of time where the newly detained cannot vote. New Yorkers who plan to vote absentee are required to submit their application to receive a ballot more than two weeks before election day. Those who are
detained at Rikers after that deadline are, currently, left with no option to cast their ballot -- despite their legal right to “adequate and equitable access” to the vote. Bringing early voting locations to Rikers Island would offer those detained after the absentee application deadline an opportunity to vote. It would also provide a much easier option for all people housed at Rikers to participate in elections.

We look forward to hearing from your office and finding ways to expand the right to vote for those currently detained in New York City Jails.

Sincerely,
The Coalition for Voting in NYC Jails

New York State Senator Julia Salazar
New York State Senator Alessandra Biaggi, 34th District
New York State Assembly Member Jessica González-Rojas
New York State Assembly Member Latrice Walker
New York City Council Member Tiffany Cabán
New York City Council Member Carlina Rivera
New York City Council Member Kevin C. Riley
New York City Council Member Kristin Jordan, District 9
New York City Council Member Marjorie Velazquez
New York City Council Member Erik Bottcher
New York City Council Member Eric Dinowitz, District 11
New York City Council Member Shekar Krishnan, District 25
New York City Council Member Crystal Hudson
New York City Council Member Julie Won, District 27
New York City Council Member Chi Ossé
New York City Council Member Althea Stevens, District 16
New York City Council Member Amanda Farias
New York City Council Member Jennifer Gutierrez
New York City Council Member Lincoln Restler
New York City Council Member Shahana Hanif
New York City Council Member Rita Joseph
New York City Council Member Alexa Avilés, District 38
A Little Piece of Light
AAS EMPOWERMENT LLC
Ali Forney Center
All Saints’ Episcopal Church
Alliance Of Families For Justice
American Friends Service Committee
Executive Director, Artistic Noise
BronxConnect
The Bronx Defenders
CCIT-NYC
Center for Community Alternatives
Church of the Ascension
College & Community Fellowship
Congregation Beit Simchat Torah
Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH)
The Department of Corrections
Exodus Trandistional Community
Exodus Transitional Community
Five Borough Defenders
Fourth Universalist Society in the City of New York
Freedom Agenda
Future Coalition
The Gathering for Justice / Justice League NYC
Good Call
Hour Children
JFREJ; T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
The Legal Aid Society of New York
March On
NAMI QN
National Action Network
National Action Network NYC Chapter Second Chance Committee
National Action Network Political Action Committee
New Hour for Women & Children LI
The New Shul
New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU)
NYC Presbytery Justice Ministries
Nurses for Social Justice
The Osborne Association
Police Reform Organizing Project (PROP)
Providence House, Inc
Red Hook Initiative
Rising Ground, Inc.
STEPS to End Family Violence
The Sentencing Project
Trellis / Next Step Community Church
Urban Justice Center
United Community Centers
United Madrassi Association Inc.
V-Day
West 135th Street Apartments Tenant Association, Inc.
Women & Justice Project
Youth Justice Network
Youth Over Guns
Youth Represent