

## VOTE IN NYC JAILS COALITION



Via Electronic Mail

June 7, 2022

Board of Elections in the City of New York  
Fredric Umane, President  
Miguelina Camilo, Secretary  
Michael J. Ryan, Executive Director  
Dawn Sandow, Deputy Executive Director  
32-42 Broadway, 7 Fl  
New York, NY 10004

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, 34<sup>th</sup> 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 Transdistional 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