

Testimony to the Board of Corrections

October 13, 2020

By Sarita Daftary, member, Jails Action Coalition & co-Director, Freedom Agenda

Good morning, and thank you, Board Members, for this opportunity to comment. I'll focus my testimony today on two things - ending solitary confinement, and the tragic death in DOC custody last Friday.

Regarding ending solitary confinement - as Board members tasked with the incredibly important power of oversight over spaces that are otherwise hidden from public view, I think you know what you must do. You must vote immediately to end solitary confinement. It is torture. It causes irreparable harm to people. In the years since the Jails Action Coalition has been pushing for you to update your rules on restrictive housing, over 8,500 people have suffered the torture of solitary confinement. In this year alone, over 900 people have suffered the torture of solitary confinement. Since the beginning of the rule-making process last fall, you have heard testimony from dozens of people who have suffered this exact torture. You've also heard from other formerly incarcerated people who have told you that solitary confinement absolutely DOES NOT make them safer, but in fact adds to the violent environment of the jails by further traumatizing already-traumatized people. This Board does not need the agreement of a working group, or COBA, or DOC to move forward with utilizing your independent oversight power to end torture in NYC jails NOW.

Regarding the recent death in DOC custody - I want to urge the Board to conduct a full investigation into the death of Christopher Cruz, in addition to the full investigation, which advocates requested last month, into the death of Hector Rodriguez. The report that the Board issued on the tragic death of Layleen Xtravaganza Cubilette-Polanco is likely the only reason that any staff were held accountable for their negligence that led to her death. It is one of the most important and necessary functions this Board can fulfill to gather a full accounting of the events leading up to the death of any person in the custody of the Department of Correction, because people in custody are wholly dependant on correction officers and CHS workers for their care, without even the most basic freedoms that the rest of us can exercise to keep ourselves healthy and safe.

Every person behind those walls, and everyone who loves them, and everyone who advocates for them, is relying on this Board to exercise every type of authority available to you, and make use of every ounce of evidence available to you.

Thank you,

Sarita Daftary
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