

Commissioner Joseph Ponte
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As prepared for delivery

- Thank you, Ross, for your introduction. I would also like to thank you all for coming here today.
- I would like to tell you today about the job we have been doing in the last two years, bringing reform and safety to the New York City Department of Correction.
- After years of neglect and rising violence in the city jails, Mayor de Blasio entered office in 2014 with a mandate to create a culture of safety throughout the Department of Correction.
- I came on board on April 2014, and one of the first things I did was look at what long-term plans the Department had.
- And I found that there were no long-term plans, there were no plans to meet staffing needs, no plans to make our jails safer, and no plans to meet the physical infrastructure needs of our aging jails.
- So one of the first actions we took was to conduct a top-to-bottom review of our policies, practices, and personnel.
- We took an Organizational Health Survey and held town hall meetings in order to learn as much as we could from staff and listen to all opinions.
- A key result of that top-to-bottom review was the 14-point Anti-Violence Reform Agenda, which we launched in March 2015.
- Simply put -- the 14-point Anti-Violence agenda was created to aggressively combat violence and promote a culture of safety across the Department.
- It is a comprehensive plan that covers the necessary changes needed to reform Rikers and the entire Department, after years of neglect.
- Years before, in 2011, the Legal Aid Society and two private firms filed a class action suit, known as the Nunez case, against the City alleging a pattern and practice of excessive force against inmates in violation of their rights.

- A year later in 2012, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York conducted an investigation into the treatment of male inmates between the ages of 16 and 18.
- The investigation by the U.S. Attorney’s Office and the Department of Justice found that the City had engaged in a pattern and practice of excessive and unnecessary use of force, failed to adequately protect inmates from inmate on inmate violence, and placed inmates in punitive segregation at an alarming rate and for excessive periods.
- In October 2015, months after launching our 14-point anti-violence agenda, the City of New York negotiated and reached a final settlement agreement of the Nunez/DOJ case with Legal Aid and the Department of Justice.
- This agreement outlined reforms to create safer jails, and the Department has gone beyond those reforms – we have required more hours of training for our officers, have expanded resources for our youngest inmates, ended punitive segregation for 16, 17, and 18 year-olds, and we have effectively ended punitive segregation for 19-21 year-olds, by any national standard or definition.
- Punitive segregation is defined nationwide as 22 hours or more of lock-in time. That no longer exists at the New York City Department of Correction for this age group.
- While no assault on an officer or other staff is ever acceptable, major violence indicators have been dropping at the Department since the reforms began taking hold.
- I will go into detail about these achievements in a bit, but I first want to talk about *what it takes* to make reform in jails possible, and walk you through some of the steps we’ve taken.
- All correctional reform starts and ends with the officer.
- I have often stressed that the safety of our officers is paramount in our reforms.
- When staff are trained and supported and empowered, we get very good results.
- As part of our reforms, the City invested nearly \$200 million on officer safety, this includes:
 - \$72.5 million for 100 percent camera coverage, x-ray machines, lock replacements, emergency response gear, and other safety equipment and protective gear;
 - \$51 million for the hiring of additional officers;

- \$23.5 million for additional officer training focused on violence reduction, and on working with mentally ill and adolescent populations;
- These investments have been vital in creating safer jails.
- Increased camera coverage helps us monitor inmate movement and prevent violence better than ever before.
- We are working towards 100% camera coverage at our adolescent facility, our main young-adult facility, and at the George R. Vierno Center, our first model facility.
- Prior to this administration, only 18% of the agency had camera coverage.
- Meanwhile, investments in X-ray machine and scanners, K-9 Units, and investigation teams are helping keep drugs and weapons contraband out.
- These investments have helped us find 35% more contraband in the first 8 months of the year, from January to August, compared to the same period last year.
- Keeping weapons and drugs out of Rikers is the first item on our 14-point anti-violence reform agenda. Less contraband means less violence.
- We have also increased focus on swiftly prosecuting inmates for assaults against officers.
- We have beefed up the Correction Intelligence Bureau by adding a dedicated Arrest Unit with a staff of nine to put together priority cases to present to the Bronx DA's office. Prior to this administration, no such unit existed.
- The Bronx D.A. is about to open a new office on Rikers Island, which will help speed this process.
- It would also be helpful if inmates were sentenced to consecutive terms for serious assaults.
- Total inmate arrests at the Department rose 92% in the first 8 months of the year, compared to last year, from 499 to 960.
- And we are doing much more.
- We are looking for the best, qualified candidates to become correction officers.

- Our aggressive recruitment approach includes having a dedicated Application Investigation Unit whose sole purpose is to investigate correction officer applicants.
- Our Application Investigation Unit has gone from a staff of 19 in August 2014 to a staff of 87, and includes Investigators, Psychologists, Nurses, Doctors, a field team, a social media team, and a “Not Qualified” team.
- They weed out applicants with red flags by conducting field visits to candidates’ homes and doing background searches using social media and credit checks.
- Prior to 2014, no such unit existed and no thorough vetting process was in place.
- Our graduation class in May 2016 had more than 600 recruits. A class of 750 started in June 2016, and approximately 1,200 recruits will comprise the next class, who will begin training in December.
- Even as we train more recruits, we are providing more training to our current staff, to give them the best tools to do their jobs. Over the next few years, staff will receive in-service training that includes:
 - Use of Force,
 - Crisis Intervention and Conflict Resolution,
 - Direct Supervision and Safe Crisis Management for those working with adolescents and young adults,
 - Crisis Intervention Training, and
 - Other additional training that will help them perform their job better.
- We’ve spoken about the safety measures for officers, and now I want to talk about inmate safety – because enacting reform takes a two-prong approach.
- Officer safety is critical. You can’t have inmate safety without officer safety.
- We are working on making our jails safer and creating inmate education opportunities and services that help reduce inmate idleness.
- When inmates are kept busy in programs that they enjoy and will benefit them in the long-run, they are less likely to lash out and commit violent acts.

- Inmate programs that provide skills and educational opportunities also help lower inmate recidivism by providing them with the skills they need to transition back into our communities, return to their families, and find jobs once they are released.
- These programs include:
 - The Individualized Correction Achievement Network, or ICAN program, which is an innovative jail-based community reentry program done in partnership with the Osborne Association and the Fortune Society. Inmates in this program learn job skills like interview and resume preparation, and vocational skills like plumbing, carpentry and building maintenance, and food service.

and

- CUNY Next Steps, a program done in partnership with LaGuardia Community College, Hostos Community College, STRIVE International and the New York Public Library, provides classes that spur personal growth and prompt inmates to think about and plan for their futures. Next Steps also provides participants with post-release services like job placement support and paid internships.
- We also have a new program being launched at the Rose M. Singer Center, our women’s facility. It is the St. John's University Inside Out program, which will provide college course for female inmates.
- We are also reducing violence among inmates by improving the way we house inmates.
- Historically, the Department managed all inmates uniformly, regardless of the inmates’ needs.
- We have moved away from that cookie-cutter approach and are instead separating certain populations, namely the seriously mentally ill, adolescents, and young adults.
- In adolescent areas, we have increased staffing ratios, from 1 officer per 33 adolescents, to 1 officer per 15 adolescents. In addition, all adolescents receive expanded programming, including daily access to indoor recreation spaces.
- As part of the city’s long-standing pledge to improve conditions for adolescents, the city has made a commitment to move adolescents out of Rikers.
- The Mayor’s executive budget has allocated \$170 million over the next two years to build a new facility off the island that will safely house our youngest inmates.

- And, as I mentioned earlier, we eliminated punitive segregation for adolescents in December 2014.
- For young-adult inmates, ages 18-21 we created new housing that suits their development.
- Dynamic programming has been developed for this group, including career and technical education programs like:
 - The Success Program, a hybrid educational service program that includes traditional curriculum and career and technical education components offered by our Department and the Department of Education. This program includes industry-recognized credentials;
 - Higher Learning Program, career and technical courses, workforce development, job readiness training and college readiness and continuing education courses offered by *College Way*;
 - Beats, Rhymes & Justice, a program in which Columbia University students work in teams alongside the inmates to craft and record hip-hop songs with an emphasis on issues of justice. Classes include making beats on i-Pads and writing lyrics.

and, one of our most popular programs,

 - Rikers Rovers, a 9-week canine training program, ending with animal care and handling certification, and with a curriculum developed by North Shore Animal League.
- Critically, we are also starting discharge-planning services for adolescents and young adults through the Friends of Island Academy. This is the first time that meaningful discharge-planning services will be available for adolescents.
- I would also like to mention that earlier this week, one of our longtime staff members Deputy Warden-in-Command Jacqueline Brantley of the George Motchan Detention Center, which houses most of our young adults, was praised by Board of Correction member Judge Bryanne Hammill for her commitment to helping young inmates and ending recidivism.
- It's staff like Dep. Brantley that really make our reforms possible.
- Another special population we look after is the mentally-ill. This population has increased in the last five years.

- In FY2011, 32% of our population had mental health needs. Today, that population is approximately 42%.
- We are the largest mental hospital in the East Coast. In the West Coast, the largest is L.A. County jail.
- In June 2015, the City announced New York City Health and Hospitals would take over correctional health services from private contractor Corizon. The transition was completed January 1, 2016.
- We are working closely with Health and Hospitals staff to improve coordination and help provide better health services.
- Included in our mental health population, we have inmates who are diagnosed with serious mental health needs.
- For this population, we have created or expanded clinically focused units, CAPS and PACE – Clinical Alternatives to Punitive Segregation and Program to Accelerate Clinical Effectiveness.
- These units are for seriously mentally ill inmates who have fractured or who struggle to function adequately due to chronic mental illness.
- Inmates at CAPS and PACE take part in intensive, therapeutic schedules that include morning meetings and one-on-one encounters with Mental Health Clinicians and Psychiatrists.
- Inmates at CAPS and PACE are involved in fewer uses of force incidents and show lower rates of self-harm than similar inmates in other housing.
- CAPS and PACE have been very successful and are now serving as a national model. Correction officials from across the country have visited, to see and learn from these units.
- We are expanding on this successful model and will be building even more clinically focused units over the next few years.
- As part of our top-to-bottom reform initiative, we are also working to bring DOC into compliance with the Prison Rape Elimination Act, also referred to as PREA.
- In 2012, when the federal standards became effective, the Department started working on this very important issue.

- We have a focused strategic plan to become PREA compliant and have contracted with the national consulting firm, the Moss Group, through Department of Justice grants to train staff and refine jail practices in relation to PREA compliance.
- We employ a full-time PREA coordinator, PREA Compliance Managers, and every Academy recruit is trained in the zero-tolerance policy.
- In-line staff are also trained.
- Currently, more than 1,200 line staff, including more than 140 Investigation Division staff, and all uniform and non-uniform Executive leadership have completed PREA Training.
- Training is ongoing and will continue until every staff member, volunteer, and vendor has through it.
- In addition, our Investigations Division created a new division, whose investigators have been specially trained to respond to sexual assault and abuse allegations within a jail setting.
- Some members of this Investigations Division have also received the same training as the NYPD sex crimes unit.
- Another transformation within Department has been the use of punitive segregation.
- When I came on board in April 2014, there were almost 600 people in punitive segregation. On September 1st, we had 115 inmates in punitive segregation.
- That is an 80% reduction in two years, which we accomplished by creating non-punitive, incentive-based alternatives to safely manage inmate behavior.
- We ended punitive segregation for adolescents in December 2014 and for 18 year-olds in June 2016. And we have effectively ended it for 19-21 year-olds.
- The Department is rolling out all of the reforms together, facility-by-facility, by creating “model facilities” within the Department that are leading the way.
- We have accomplished this despite the fact that many facilities at Rikers are aging.
- The average age of operating jails across the Department is 32 years old, 3 of which are more than 50 years old, yet house a significant population of inmates and staff.
- Many of these facilities require major renovations in order to be in compliance with City 2008 building codes and mandated Court-ordered requirements.

- These facilities have been neglected to the point that major renovations are now needed for fire safety, heating, ventilation, A/C, new roofs, and façade restoration, among others repairs.
- In September 2015, the George R. Vierno Center, also known as GRVC, became the first model facility. In late April 2016, Anna M. Kross Center -- AMKC -- became the second model facility.
- As jails become model facilities, infrastructure upgrades are made in housing areas, available programming is increased so that five hours are offered daily, and incident response procedures are revamped.
- We are also housing inmates differently, using the Housing Unit Builder (HUB). This system helps separate potentially violent inmates from others to make housing units safer.
- Critically, staff are steadied and increased where necessary. The effect of the reforms in these areas has already been notable, in both violence reduction and staff satisfaction and empowerment.
- As I've mentioned before, even one assault is one too many, but violence is decreasing at the model facilities and restart units.
- At GRVC, slashings and stabbings have dropped 77%, overall uses of force have dropped 15%, and serious assaults on staff have dropped 20% during the first eight months of the year, compared to last year.
- In Housing Unit 9A at GRVC, which went through the restart effort, there has not been a violent incident in more than 200 days.
- None of this would be possible without the dedicated team at GRVC, which is led by Warden Monica Windley. She and her staff led the way in rolling out a series of reforms simultaneously and making GRVC, the successful model facility it is today.
- In Quad Upper 17 and 19 at AMKC, our largest jail, there have no violent incidents in more than 125 days.
- Warden Maxsolaine Mingo of AMKC has been instrumental in the success at that facility. She recently said that in her 19 years with the Department, she has never seen the amount of change that has happened in the last two years.

- Both of these wardens were singled out by Mayor Bill de Blasio during his recent to Rikers Island.
- The results in our restart units have exceeded expectations.
- Our reforms are not limited to our model facilities, they are being seen Department-wide.
- In part because of these reforms, the most serious assaults on staff have dropped 40% in the first eight months of the year, from January to August, compared to the same period last year.
- Overall assaults on staff dropped 17%. Again, one assault is one too many so we have work to do.
- The reforms also benefit inmate safety. Uses of force by officers on inmates that result in serious injury dropped by 40% largely due to our de-escalation training.
- Most recently, the Mayor and I announced new officer safety measures that include technology upgrades -- tasers to de-escalate violence and new scanners to screen for contraband.
- The new scanners will be the highest-quality non-ionizing scanners allowed under state law – much like those found at airports – and will help detect contraband that the current technology cannot.
- The new scanners will be placed in the visitor processing center on Rikers Island and other key locations on Rikers Island and across the city and will be used to screen both inmates and visitors.
- DOC is working with the state legislature to amend section 3502 of the Public Health Law in order to authorize the use of body scanners in local correctional facilities.
- We are also changing the way emergency staff is deployed to better address violent incidents.
- Our Emergency Services Unit – a Rikers-based, centrally-located specialized unit that responds to urgent incidents will now be stationed in teams within multiple facilities on Rikers, as well as in some borough based facilities.
- This approach will drastically decrease the time it takes to respond to urgent incidents occurring in the facilities, and prevent any serious injury to both officers and inmates.
- Our new safety measures also include aggressively recruiting and training new staff to help address significant overtime burdens on officers.

- As mentioned earlier, we will have approximately 1,200 recruits in our next class, who will begin training in December and take their posts next year.
- Although we have much left to do, the Department is on the right track to in reforming Rikers and the entire New York City Department of Correction.
- Thank you for your time.