

PRESS RELEASE



The New York City Department of Correction

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AT BOARD OF CORRECTION MEETING, COMMISSIONER PONTE OUTLINES DRAMATIC REFORMS TO REDUCE JAIL VIOLENCE, ENHANCE SAFETY OF STAFF AND INMATES ALIKE

*Department of Correction Asks NYC Board of Correction to Approve New Housing Unit for
City's Most Violent Inmates*

*Commissioner Ponte Announces that DOC Expects To Install Security Cameras in 100
Percent of its Facilities On Rikers Within 18 Months*

NEW YORK—As part of the de Blasio Administration's comprehensive strategy to reduce jail-based violence and create a more humane system that promotes better inmate outcomes, Commissioner Ponte today asked the New York City Board of Correction (BOC) to approve a series of reforms designed to reduce violence and curtail the use of punitive segregation in New York City's jails.

Commissioner Ponte announced that the Department's reforms call for installing security cameras in every DOC facility on Rikers Island within the next 18 months. This expansion will improve safety in City jails. Cameras serve as vital investigative tools and as deterrents to both inmates and staff from violating Department policies.

"We expect to install over 7,800 new cameras facility wide, which will almost triple the number of cameras throughout the Department of Correction," said **Commissioner Ponte**. "With the installation of these new cameras, we are creating a safer and more secure physical environment, which is key to enhancing the safety and transparency of the City's jails."

Commissioner Ponte also outlined three major reforms to punitive segregation that reflect lessons from his management and reform of other systems, research and evidence, and concerns raised by advocacy groups and other New Yorkers. Commissioner Ponte has acted to:

- **Eliminate the use of punitive segregation for adolescents** (16-17 year olds). The Department's goal is to completely eliminate punitive segregation for this age group by the end of the year.
- **Eliminate punitive segregation for "time owed"** by inmates returning to NYC jails.
- **Place a cap on punitive segregation.** Commissioner Ponte's goal is to reduce the maximum amount of time an inmate can spend in punitive segregation from 90 days to 30 days.

At the heart of this reform package is the creation of Enhanced Supervision Housing (ESH) on Rikers Island, a non-punitive, highly secure housing unit for the small number of highly dangerous inmates who are responsible for most of the violence in New York City's jails. ESH will feature a number of security elements, including a higher staff-to-inmate ratio and at least 7 hours of mandated out-of-cell time. The unit will also limit inmate movement and lower the risk of violence by bringing BOC-mandated services, such as law library and congregate services, to the housing unit, instead of requiring staff to escort inmates to these services elsewhere in the building, as is done in general population.

"Current Board of Correction rules limit the Department to two responses to inmates who commit infractions: they're either placed in punitive segregation or they continue to live in the general population. This has led to an over-use of punitive segregation for inmates who commit low-level infractions and an unacceptable backlog of inmates with serious infractions still in the general population awaiting punitive segregation beds," said **Commissioner Ponte**. "By enabling the Department to manage its most dangerous inmates more securely, ESH will create substantial opportunities for more meaningful reform and reduce the use of punitive segregation."

ESH housing is one of several anti-violence measures funded by the additional \$27.3 million that Mayor de Blasio added to the Department's budget in June 2014. Under the Department's plan, ESH will enable a wide range of additional changes, beginning with discontinuing the practice of owed punitive segregation time for returning inmates. Without the prior establishment of ESH, however, these other reforms will be neither safe, nor practical. They work as an integrated package, or not at all.

ESH and its related reforms are part of Commissioner Ponte's broader reform effort, which includes a greater commitment to meeting the needs of mentally ill inmates in cooperation with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; establishing a developmentally appropriate custody management plan for adolescent inmates, including ending the use of punitive segregation of adolescents; specific steps to improve custody management, such as requiring jumpsuits for all inmates and giving officers authority to correct minor rule violations; and a greater commitment to recruiting, training, and retaining the highest caliber staff.

About the New York City Department of Correction

The New York City Department of Correction (DOC) manages the jail system for New York City. It operates Rikers Island, which houses 10 individual facilities, four borough-based jails and two hospital prison wards, as well as court pens in all five boroughs. In FY 2014, DOC had 77,141 admissions involving 56,218 individuals. Its Average Daily Population is approximately

11,400, over 80 percent of whom are housed on Rikers Island. Most of the inmates in DOC custody are being detained pending the resolution of charges against them; approximately 15 percent are city-sentenced inmates who are serving sentences of one year or less.

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