

PRESS
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The New York City Department of Correction

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jack Ryan (718) 546-0921 Jack.Ryan@doc.nyc.gov

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VERA INSTITUTE SELECTS NEW YORK CITY'S DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION TO JOIN SAFE ALTERNATIVES TO SEGREGATION INITIATIVE

NEW YORK – New York City's Department of Correction today joined the prestigious Safe Alternatives to Segregation (SAS) Initiative of the Vera Institute of Justice. Commissioner Joe Ponte hailed the selection of DOC as one of five state and local jail systems invited to join the SAS initiative, which seeks to reduce the use of punitive segregation.

“We are honored to be chosen to participate in the Vera Institute's Safe Alternatives to Segregation initiative, supported by the Bureau of Justice Assistance,” said **Correction Commissioner Joe Ponte**. “Our selection speaks to our progress as DOC works to promote a culture of safety at all our facilities. DOC is committed to reducing the use of segregation and to facilitating rehabilitation. We ended punitive segregation for adolescent inmates last December, and we are working toward ending punitive segregation for 18-to-21-year-olds by next January. These reforms will promote better behavior, psychological health, and emotional well-being among our inmates and help to create safer jails for staff and inmates alike. The SAS program and the technical assistance of the renowned Vera Institute will help DOC move these initiatives forward using best practice and help New York City return to its place at the forefront of the corrections field.”

Over the course of the next year, Vera will provide DOC with technical assistance to analyze the use of punitive segregation, recommend methods to safely reduce its use, and assist with the implementation of alternative policies and programs. The other correction departments invited to join the Vera Institute's SAS initiative are Nebraska, Oregon, and North Carolina, and Middlesex County, New Jersey.

“The enthusiastic response from applicants for this initiative proves that corrections officials are eager for new approaches to protecting the safety of inmates and staff, and we look forward to working closely with these selected sites,” said **Fred Patrick, director of Vera's Center on Sentencing and Corrections.**

Under the leadership of Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Ponte, the NYC Department of Correction has embarked on a 14-point initiative to reduce violence and promote a culture of safety in the jails. A key part of that agenda is improving custody management, including creating alternatives to punitive segregation. DOC believes that a one-size-fits-all approach to custody management is often counterproductive, and is working toward a safer jail system through punitive segregation reforms that help DOC better manage the specific needs of the inmate population.

DOC ended punitive segregation for adolescent inmates last December, and is working toward ending punitive segregation for 18-to-21-year-olds by next January, which would put it at the forefront of American correctional reform efforts. DOC also created CAPS, a therapeutic unit designed for inmates who commit infractions and are determined to be seriously mentally ill.

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.

About the Vera Institute for Justice

The Vera Institute of Justice combines expertise in research, demonstration projects, and technical assistance to help leaders in government and civil society improve the systems people rely on for justice and safety.

Vera is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit center for justice policy and practice, with offices in New York City, Washington, D.C., New Orleans, and Los Angeles. Our projects and reform initiatives, typically conducted in partnership with local, state, or national officials, are located across the United States and around the world.

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