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COUNCIL MEMBER, 2ND DISTRICT
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July 9, 2019

Testimony to the July 9 Meeting of the New York City Board of Correction

Dear Members of the Board,

As the Co-Chair of the Council's Women's Caucus and a member of the Progressive Caucus, I am here representing the position of the two caucuses as it relates to solitary confinement.

On June 26, 2019, the Progressive and Women's Caucuses of the New York City Council sent a letter to the Department of Correction, the Board of Correction, and the Mayor, demanding an immediate end to solitary. Our call to end solitary comes in response to the death of a 27-year-old trans woman of color at Rikers. Layleen Polanco spent the last nine days of her life in solitary confinement until she was discovered unconscious in her cell on June 7.

No person should be required to spend 22 to 24 hours a day in a cell without meaningful human contact, programming, or therapy, and it is unacceptable that still, in 2019, New York City jails continue to employ the inhumane practice of solitary confinement. This continues despite the wealth of evidence that solitary confinement causes severe psychological, emotional, and physical harm and contributes significantly to recidivism.

This Council is clear in its advocacy on this issue. New York City Council Speaker Corey Johnson said it best; "Solitary confinement is torture, plain and simple." And Speaker Johnson and Criminal Justice Committee Chair Keith Powers have also called for BOC to "update its standards on punitive segregation and conduct a review of solitary confinement with an aim toward ending the practice."

Supporters of this practice would claim that solitary is necessary to discourage violent behavior. [But multiple studies show that not to be the case](#), including a [2015 examination that found](#) that those who were disciplined with time in solitary were no more or less violent after the punishment.

New York currently imposes such isolated confinement far too broadly, routinely, and frequently in response to non-violent conduct, and for far too long a period of time — often months and years. I hope you will consider the Caucuses' call for an end to solitary confinement at Rikers Island in your rule-making capacity and continue to embrace evidence-based incarceration policies that are smart, progressive, and humane. New York City should continue to be a leader in reforming the criminal justice system and providing incarcerated people the basic rights they deserve.