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Testimony to the December 2 Meeting of the New York City Board of Correction

Thank you members of the Board for accepting my testimony this morning. As the Co-Chair of the New York City Council’s Women’s Caucus and a member of the Council’s Progressive Caucus, I continue to urge the city to end solitary confinement in all its forms. The Board of Correction’s proposed rule changes – which still allow solitary confinement for up to 15 days – merely reduce the torturous practice rather than fully eliminate it.

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 came 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. I have since joined the HALT Solitary campaign in supporting their blueprint to end solitary in New York City, which the Board should be considering instead of the plan before you.

These proposed changes come after months of delays and the Mayor’s unprecedented decision to not reappoint Commissioner Bryanne Hamill, who had worked for years on a comprehensive proposal to restrict solitary confinement. With such high stakes, the lack of transparency offered by the Mayor’s Office regarding this decision and these rules is concerning.

The proposed rule changes also inaccurately attempt to draw a balance between “rehabilitation” and “order,” by including the provision of up to 60 days of sentencing in solitary confinement for alleged assaults on staff. However, [multiple studies](#), including a [2015 examination](#) from the University of Texas at Dallas, found that those who were disciplined with time in solitary were no more or less violent after the punishment. Moreover, the rule changes were publicly released just one day after a report by the [federal monitor](#) charged with overseeing the city jail system found that “staff are often hyper-confrontational and respond to incidents in a manner that is hasty, hurried, thoughtless, reckless, careless, or in disregard.” It is unacceptable that still, in 2019, New York City jails continue to employ this inhumane practice.

In consideration of the City Council’s recent vote to close Riker’s Island, it is imperative that New York City embrace evidence-based incarceration policies that are smart and progressive moving for-

ward. New York City should continue to be a leader in reforming the criminal justice system and ensure the humanity and dignity of every person. I strongly urge the Board of Correction to adopt safe alternatives to solitary confinement. Until then, my office will continue to advocate for an end to this harmful practice.

Thank you.