

PRESS
RELEASE



The New York City Department of Correction

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Robin Campbell (718) 546-0635 robin.campbell@doc.nyc.gov

Tuesday, November 18, 2014

**DOC OPENS NEW HOUSING UNIT FOR TRANSGENDER WOMEN
ON RIKERS ISLAND**

***Specialized Housing and Services for Men Who Identify as Women Expected to Increase Jail Safety
and Improve Long-Term Inmate Outcomes***

East Elmhurst, NY – The New York City Department of Correction (DOC) is opening a new Transgender Housing Unit for transgender women (people assigned male at birth but who identify and live as a woman) as part of its comprehensive reform aimed at making New York City’s jails safer and improving inmate outcomes.

Developed with advice and feedback from the LGBTQI community, the unit, which is opening this week, is designed to offer transgender women safe and respectful separation from the general population along with access to medical and mental health care as necessary and a range of programs and services.

“Because inmates are not all alike, the Department is creating specialized housing for many specific inmate groups,” said DOC Commissioner Joe Ponte. “Just as adolescents, young adults, and mentally ill inmates have specialized needs, so do men who identify as women. Providing them with specialized housing and services is good policy and meaningful reform and is expected to reduce incidents involving these individuals while also leading to better long-term outcomes, including possible reductions in recidivism.”

The Transgender Housing Unit has an initial capacity of 30 beds, which is expected to be sufficient to meet demand. There are typically between 30 and 35 transgender women in DOC custody at any given time, and inmates will be placed in the unit voluntarily. In addition to consulting with advocacy groups, the Department also conducted focus groups and conversations with transgender women in custody to ensure that the unit would meet their needs and be sensitive to the additional challenges that transgendered inmates face while in custody.

Prior to the creation of the Transgender Housing Unit, which is located in the North Infirmery Command (NIC), a male facility on Rikers Island, most transgender women were housed in the general population or in protective custody.

“We are taking extra precautions to ensure these individuals are safe and receive appropriate support,” said Assistant Chief Yolanda Canty, who oversees NIC along with several other facilities. “This includes recruiting dedicated staff who are comfortable working with this population and providing them with training on how to work with transgender women sensitively and effectively.”

Background on reform at DOC

The New York City Department of Correction (DOC) is undergoing unprecedented changes under the leadership of its new commissioner, Joe Ponte. Since he joined the Department in April 2014, Commissioner Ponte has initiated a top-to-bottom review of DOC policies, practices, and personnel and has begun implementing comprehensive, immediate and long-term reform to reduce violence and improve inmate outcomes. This includes, among other things, radically redesigning training; updating the Use of Force policy; pursuing developmentally appropriate custody management and programming; and implementing newly funded specialized housing for high custody inmates and those with significant mental health needs. As part of this overall change, the Department has replaced the majority of its senior executive and uniformed 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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