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PRESS
RELEASE



The New York City Department of Correction

DOC LAUNCHES FREE, EXPRESS VISITOR BUS SERVICE TO RIKERS ISLAND

Nonstop service makes the island more accessible to visitors

April 25, 2018—New Yorkers now have access to a free, express bus service to Rikers Island, courtesy of a new program from the New York City Department of Correction designed to facilitate visits for family and friends of people in custody.

The new buses to Rikers will depart from two locations: East 125th and 3rd Avenue in Harlem, and Jay Street between Fulton and Willoughby in downtown Brooklyn. Both buses will run during [normal visit hours](#), Wednesday through Sunday.

“These buses are not only going to make visiting Rikers more convenient, they are going to improve the lives of both staff and people in custody. Along with carrying passengers, they will also bring a sense of comfort and even safety for those on the other end of these visits,” said **Department of Correction Commissioner Cynthia Brann**. “Regular contact with families and loved ones helps foster confidence and a sense of purpose. These visits help maintain a family nucleus and provide hope, showing those in custody they are not alone. The easier it is to get to Rikers for loved ones, the more often they will visit. We believe people are less likely to return to our custody when family bonds and community connections are nurtured.”

[Studies have shown](#) that regular visits, especially during the final months of incarceration, can help reduce recidivism. Consistent visits can also decrease misconduct during incarceration.



Many of the 250,000 yearly visitors to Rikers Island depend entirely on public transportation, which is currently limited to the Q100 bus, accessible only in Queens. That can mean families travelling and transferring for hours to get to Rikers, a round trip that can take up much of the day. The new visit bus lines, both located near major subway hubs, are expected to reduce that travel time significantly.

From the Harlem hub, estimated travel time to Rikers is 30-45 minutes, while the trip from Brooklyn is 45-60 minutes. The program, launched with an \$800,000 budget, will begin with one bus serving each hub, then eventually ramp up to six dedicated buses serving up to 900 visitors a day at an estimated annual cost of \$1.6 million. Full bus schedules are available at the DOC Website, as is the Visitor Handbook, a guide to all the information on visiting someone in DOC custody.

Stanley Richards, Executive Vice President of The Fortune Society said, “This is a solid start in supporting and expanding direct visit access to Rikers Island. As Executive Vice President of The Fortune Society and a formerly incarcerated person who spent many years on Rikers, I can tell you, firsthand, that reducing travel time, and removing barriers to getting to Rikers Island will increase and strengthen the connections between family, friends and those who are incarcerated. This is truly a significant step toward having a ‘smaller, safer and fairer’ criminal justice system. Fortune Society applauds Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Brann on this monumental step in supporting those who have loved ones detained on Rikers Island.”

“I thank DOC for establishing a free express visitor bus service from Downtown Brooklyn to Rikers Island. This is a meaningful way to better connect families and friends to their loved ones. The stronger we can keep these bonds, the safer a city we can be,” said **Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams**.

“It can take up to half a day in travel time for families to visit their loved ones on Rikers Island. Free, express bus service will alleviate some of the stresses that come with a visit to Rikers and allow visitors to spend more time connecting with individuals in custody, said **Council Member Keith Powers, Chair of the Criminal Justice Committee**. “I commend the Mayor’s Office and Department of Correction for providing a valuable resource.”

“No New Yorker, whether they are justice-involved or not, can flourish without strong bonds with family and loved ones,” said **Council Member Stephen Levin, Chair of the General Welfare Committee**. “This initiative to ease transportation for visitors not only addresses physical isolation, it also maintains relationships that help individuals remain whole socially and emotionally. I applaud the administration’s commitment to justice reform and I look forward to continued progress upholding our values of justice and fairness.”

“The decision to provide free rides for friends and families of those incarcerated at Rikers is the absolute right decision. By providing free rides, we look to reduce recidivism and find ways to lessen the trauma associated with incarceration, especially for those who have committed minor offenses or simply sitting in Rikers waiting for their day in court. I applaud City Hall for this new initiative,” said **State Senator Marisol Alcantara**.

“Having a family member in jail is hard enough. There is no reason for the city to make it more challenging. Unfortunately, Rikers Island has always been an inconvenient place to travel. That is why these buses are such a huge step forward. Finally, visiting family in Rikers will be as easy as possible and I am glad the city made this change,” said **Assemblyman Walter Mosley**.

The new service is the latest in a series of measures DOC is taking to improve the visitor experience at Rikers and other jail facilities. Along with infrastructure improvements to the Central Visit Center, these include the addition of three self-service kiosks at the Center that allow visitors to quickly look up where

individuals are housed, a large-screen monitor with a visitor guidelines video in both English and Spanish, and the addition of civilian greeters who can explain the visit process and answer any questions. The Department has also expanded the successful Children of Incarcerated Parents Program (CHIPPP), which offers weekly visits for those involved in the child welfare system.

About the New York City Department of Correction

[The New York City Department of Correction \(DOC\)](#) provides for the care, custody, and control of persons accused of crimes or convicted and sentenced to one year or less of jail time. The Department manages 12 inmate facilities, nine of which are located on Rikers Island. In addition, the Department operates two hospital Prison Wards (Bellevue and Elmhurst hospitals) and court holding facilities in each borough. During Fiscal Year 2017, the Department handled over 58,000 admissions and managed an average daily inmate population of approximately 9,500 individuals. Our dedicated workforce of both uniformed and non-uniformed staff members represent the city's BOLDEST.