



Dear Mayor de Blasio, Commissioner Brann of the Department of Corrections, and Jacqueline Sherman of the Board of Corrections,

We as elected officials, and members of the Progressive Caucus and Women's Caucus, demand a full investigation and a public release of information regarding the death of Layleen Polanco at Rose M. Singer's women's facility on Rikers Island. A 27-year-old trans woman of color was taken from loved ones too soon, and any incident which raises questions about the treatment of incarcerated people in New York City jails requires an examination of the City's policies and practices. The Caucuses advocate for the following:

#JUSTICEFORLAYLEEN. As Speaker Johnson tweeted early after the announcement of Layleen's passing, the City must conduct a full investigation on the cause of death in a timely manner. The City has said it will require 12 weeks for an autopsy to determine the cause of death. This is unacceptable. The City should start an immediate investigation to determine the cause of death of Layleen Polanco and identify and implement steps in which such incidents could be prevented in the future.

CLOSE RIKERS & DECARCERATE. This tragedy reinforces that Rikers must close immediately, and that the City should hasten and deepen its efforts to decarcerate. Layleen had been incarcerated since April and was to be released less than a week before her passing.

IMPROVE CORRECTIONAL HEALTH & GIVE INCARCERATED NEW YORKERS REAL ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE. Although Layleen's cause of death has yet to be determined, she had an acute medical condition and was recently hospitalized. Despite requiring officer supervision due to her condition, she was placed in solitary confinement. Rikers is notorious for its dehumanizing conditions and subpar medical care, which have been responsible for the deaths of New Yorkers such as Carlos Mercado, a man with diabetes who was denied insulin on his first day in jail, and Ronald Spear, a kidney-dialysis patient who died after being kicked in the head repeatedly by a guard. Until Rikers is closed, and as the City moves towards a borough-based jail system, the City must end this culture of neglect and ensure adequate healthcare for the incarcerated New Yorkers in its care.

END SOLITARY CONFINEMENT AT RIKERS ISLAND

Furthermore, the city's jails continue to employ the inhumane practice of placing people in solitary confinement, despite the wealth of evidence that it causes severe psychological, emotional, and physical harm. Layleen was living in a transgender housing unit specifically designed to reduce the violence that transgender and gender non-conforming people face at Rikers Island. Despite this, Layleen was held in solitary confinement where she ultimately passed away. Solitary confinement is torture, plain and simple. Thousands of New Yorkers are suffering in solitary confinement, for weeks, days, months, with almost no meaningful human

contact, programming, or therapy, in claustrophobic cells. The Caucuses therefore call for an end to solitary confinement at Rikers Island and urge the Mayor to push Albany on state reforms that would limit solitary across the state. The Council will be considering a hearing on this topic in the fall of 2019.

DECRIMINALIZE SEX WORK AND PEOPLE INVOLVED IN SEX TRADE. Layleen was being held on \$500 bail for prostitution and lowest-level drug possession charges stemming from a 2017 arrest. Legal attempts to crack down on sex work and trade have failed to protect economically marginalized people. Current state laws disproportionately affect women of color and members of the trans community who are the most vulnerable and susceptible to violence and are unfairly targeted by law enforcement.

RENEW COMMITMENTS TO PROTECT TRANS WOMEN AND PEOPLE. As we celebrate LGBTQ New Yorkers in Pride Month, at this point in 2019, at least 10 transgender people fatally have been shot or killed by other violent means nationally, and countless other unexplained deaths of trans women and people has occurred likely due to systemic transphobic violence. The City must do more to prevent such incidents from occurring, which means 1) investing in organizations that do work with trans women and gender non-conforming people of color, 2) combating discrimination against trans and gender non-conforming people of color in the workplace and in the City's public spaces as a whole, and 3) decriminalizing and decarcerating trans and GNC people of color who are entangled with the criminal justice system and its collateral consequences.

We as a council are taking immediate steps to provide support to incarcerated transgender and gender non-conforming New Yorkers. Council Members Ayala, Moya, and Rosenthal have introduced legislation that would increase access to mental health and substance use treatment for transgender, gender nonconforming, non-binary, and intersex individuals (Int [1513-14](#)), require reporting on housing decisions made for transgender, gender nonconforming, and intersex individuals (Int [1530](#)), and require the board of correction to convene a task force to address policies related to the treatment of transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and intersex individuals in the dept of correction (Int [1535](#)), respectively. We will be working with our colleagues in the New York City Council to quickly pass this legislation, and call for the Mayor sign it into law immediately.

We demand immediate action and progress on the above policy changes and accountability measures so that women like Layleen can thrive in New York City.

The Progressive Caucus and Women's Caucus of the New York City Council



Council Member Diana Ayala - PC, WC
Co-Chair of the Progressive Caucus
Member of the Women's Caucus



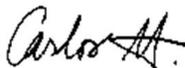
Council Member Carlina Rivera
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Member of the Progressive Caucus



Council Member Ben Kallos
Co-Chair of the Progressive Caucus



Council Member Keith Powers
Vice-Chair of the Progressive Caucus
Chair of Criminal Justice Committee



Council Member Carlos Menchaca
Vice-Chair of the Progressive Caucus
Member of the LGBT Caucus



Council Member Brad Lander
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Council Member Van Bramer - PC, LGBT
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Council Member Adrienne Adams - PC, WC
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Council Member Stephen Levin
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Council Member Andrew Cohen
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Council Member Margaret S. Chin
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Council Member Daniel Dromm



Council Member Antonio Reynoso
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Council Member Karen Koslowitz - WC
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Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo
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Council Member Helen Rosenthal
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Council Member Alicka Ampry-Samuel
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Council Member Mark Levine
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