



Dwayne C. Sampson, Chair
Helen Skipper, Vice Chair
Robert L. Cohen, M.D.
Hon. Barry A. Cozier (Ret.)
Felipe Franco
Jacqueline M. Pitts
Jude Torchenaud

Jasmine Georges-Yilla
Executive Director

BOARD OF CORRECTION
CITY OF NEW YORK
2 LAFAYETTE STREET, SUITE 1221
NEW YORK, NY 10007
212 669-7900 (Office)

Borough-based Jails Progress Report¹ **January 1, 2025**

Introduction

The New York City Board of Correction (“BOC” or “the Board”) is a non-mayoral, independent City agency created under Section 626(c) of Chapter 25 of the New York City Charter. The Board establishes and monitors compliance with minimum standards on basic conditions of confinement, medical and mental health care, eliminating sexual abuse, and restrictive housing, which are codified under Title 40 of the Rules of the City of New York and apply to all City correctional facilities (the “Minimum Standards”).

Over the past five years, the Board has issued four progress reports outlining the progress made by the Department of Correction (“DOC” or the “Department”) and the City to close Rikers Island and move all operations to a borough-based jails (“BBJ”) model, having four correctional facilities in four boroughs totaling 4,160 beds for the population. This is the Board’s fifth report submitted to the City Council in compliance with Local Law 192 for the year 2019².

Jail Population

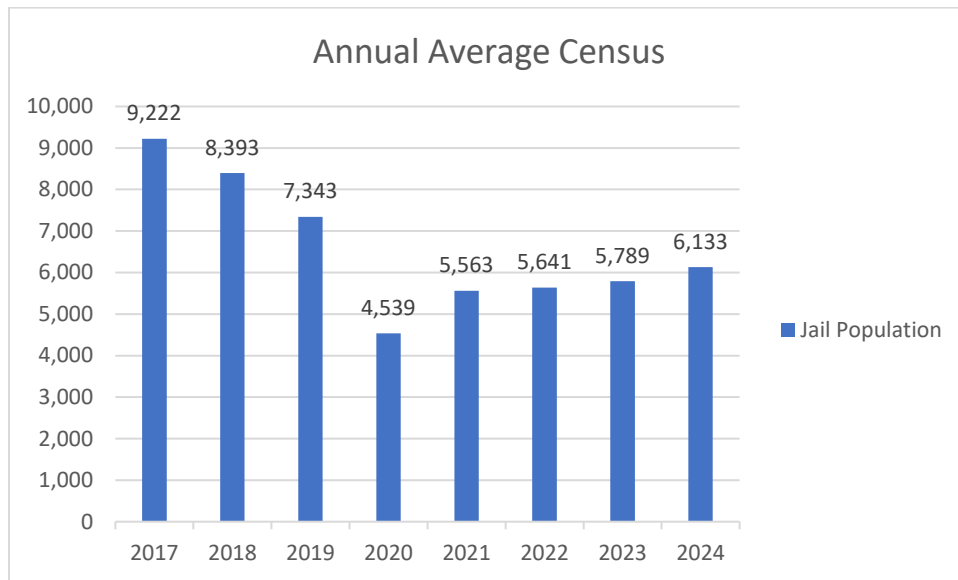
Since 2018, the Department has closed several jails permanently, this includes the George Motchan Detention Center (“GMDC”) in 2018, the Brooklyn Detention Complex (“BKDC”) in 2020, the Manhattan Detention Complex (“MDC”) in 2021, the Anna M. Kross Center

¹ This report was prepared by Katrina Blackman, Assistant Executive Director of Monitoring.

² In 2019, the City Council passed legislation—Local Law 192 for the year 2019—requiring the Board of Correction to publish semi-annual reports on the impact of closing jails on Rikers Island and constructing new facilities to replace them on: (1) people in custody, and (2) on the Department’s and Correctional Health Service’s compliance with the Minimum Standards.

(“AMKC”) in 2023, and the Vernon C. Bain Correctional Center (“VCBC”) in 2023. Over the past five years, some previously closed correctional facilities have reopened at various times due to increases in the detained population. Indeed, the Eric M. Taylor Center (“EMTC”) reopened in 2022 after closing in 2020, and the Otis Bantum Correctional Center (“OBCC”) reopened in 2023. Full transfer of Rikers Island to the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (“DCAS”) is due to be completed by August 31, 2027³.

Since the announcement in 2017 that Rikers Island would close, the annual average census saw a considerable decline between 2017 and 2020. During the COVID pandemic, the jails’ population was at its lowest in recent decades averaging 4,539 people in custody. However, since 2021, the population continues to rise.



Source: BOC Data File

In an October 2023 report⁴, the Independent Commission on NYC Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform⁵ provided a recommendation that the City and State “should collaborate to open 1,500 secure treatment beds in stages over the next three years by: opening and fully staffing the first 100 secure treatment beds—at Bellevue—by mid-2024, swiftly moving forward with the 280 other promised secure treatment beds—at Woodhull and North-Central Bronx Hospitals—and open them by the end of 2024, and finding additional space in City, State, and Federal facilities to bring at least an additional 1,100 secure treatment beds online within three years.”

Updates on Facility and Housing Area Spaces

³ The Renewable Rikers Act was signed into law by former New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio in 2021.

⁴<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b6de4731aef1de914f43628/t/6530056e07c0614a1a3d6655/1697645934489/1500+Secure+Treatment+Beds+to+Help+Close+Rikers+White+Paper.pdf>

⁵ Also known as the Lippman Commission.

The BBJ design plans include the provision of designated educational spaces in the Central Programs area of each jail. Ideally, the plan would include four classrooms for 15 students each, one testing classroom for 10 students, staff administrative and counseling offices, and interview/counseling rooms. Currently, the Department has a large population of individuals restricted from contact visits. For now, each BBJ facility will include approximately nine non-contact booths for social visits, and an additional six non-contact booths for attorney visits.

According to the Department, each cell in all BBJs will have air vents for cooling and heating. This is a step in the right direction since the Department had been marred in the past over environmental concerns in both extreme heat⁶ and cold⁷ conditions. The Board reported on extreme heat conditions in the jails in a published report in Summer 2019⁸.

Therapeutic Beds and Outposted Therapeutic Housing Units Update

During a third joint quarterly meeting, Correctional Health Services (“CHS”) provided updates regarding therapeutic beds and outpost areas for the borough-based jails. The primary intent of the outposted areas is to provide incarcerated individuals with serious medical and mental health needs close access to medical care in a therapeutic environment. CHS reported they will manage the schedule and budget for the outposted therapeutic units. Unlike the Department’s prison wards, the outposted units are intended for long term, chronic care, but not short term or sudden medical attention. The outposted units will be commissioned as jails, which requires compliance with all relevant correctional regulations and standards, including the Board’s Minimum Standards.

The Outposted Therapeutic Housing Units will have approximately 350 beds across three facilities; Bellevue Hospital, North Central Bronx Hospital, and Woodhull Hospital. Bellevue Hospital, located in Manhattan, will have a capacity of 104 beds with two cell housing areas and is anticipated to be completed in Winter 2024/2025. North Central Bronx Hospital, located in the Bronx, will have an estimated 96 beds—all dormitories—and is expected to be completed in 2027. Woodhull Hospital, located in Brooklyn, will be mixed with cells and dormitory housing areas with an estimated 150 beds and is anticipated to be completed in 2027. However, completion of the remaining two sites is dependent upon when the facilities’ designs are finalized.

The Department also announced that there will be an infirmary and contagious disease unit in each BBJ. This is a move in the right direction because it will not overwhelm a singular command to address the needs of individuals who require immediate medical attention or necessary quarantine.

⁶ Sweltering Summer Weather Stirs Familiar Concerns Over Heat in NYC Jails- <https://council.nyc.gov/shahana-hanif/2023/07/28/sweltering-summer-weather-stirs-familiar-concerns-over-heat-in-nyc-jails/>

⁷ New York Times Hundreds at Rikers Protest Conditions, Citing Covid and the Cold- <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/11/nyregion/rikers-island-hunger-strike.html>

⁸ <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/boc/downloads/pdf/Reports/BOC-Reports/BOC-Heat-Report-and-Recommendations-2019-09-09.pdf>

Thinc Design

In June 2024, Board of Correction staff and Board members attended two human experience focus groups with the consulting firm Thinc Design⁹. Thinc Design has also held listening workshops with varying groups, including other City agencies, formerly incarcerated individuals, and community residents. Part of the discussions were used to inform the working groups about the design and operational planning for the BBJ project. The sessions last for an average of two hours with full participation. To date, Thinc Design has facilitated 27 workshops with 13 constituent groups with an average of 250 participants. The overall themes found amongst the groups identified the need that all persons, staff, visitors, and people in custody want to feel safe physically and emotionally. Officers are central to almost everything and helping them do their jobs well will benefit everyone. Thinc Design staff also found that there is great emphasis on rehabilitative programming, and it is critical to reduce violence in the jails. Also, while the new facilities are critical, they must be supported with significant operational changes and priorities. The groups also emphasized transparency across agencies, more staff involvement, and leading with compassion. Members from the Lippman Commission also attended a workshop with Thinc Design, but not in conjunction with workshops with the Board.

Conclusion

The Board of Correction supports the City's plan to reduce the jail population and establish smaller, safer, and more humane jails for those who are criminally detained. The Board continues to actively participate and remain involved in the design of the new facilities by encouraging the Department to fully embrace the Minimum Standards that are necessary to maintain operations in the jails while reducing violence.

⁹ Thinc Design is a consulting firm that offers human experience workshops with communities across the nation and areas overseas. The workshops attended by Board staff discussed physical spaces in the BBJ facilities and how they could be designed to shape the experience of the facilities' users.