

RAISE THE AGE UPDATE FOR THE NEW YORK CITY BOARD OF CORRECTIONS

**New York City Administration for Children's Services
Felipe Franco, Deputy Commissioner
Division of Youth and Family Justice
October 9, 2018**

Good morning members of the Board of Corrections. I am Felipe Franco, the Deputy Commissioner of the Division of Youth and Family Justice (DYFJ) at the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). I appreciate the opportunity to update you today alongside my colleagues from the Department of Correction (DOC).

I am honored to be speaking to you today just days after there are no longer any 16- or 17-year-olds on Rikers Island. Any newly arrested 16-year-old will come to Crossroads, and any newly arrested 17-year-old will go to Horizon.

As you have heard, prior to the October 1st deadline, all 16- and 17-year-olds were transferred off Rikers Island to Horizon in a staggered approach. This transition took place through the collaboration, determination and hard work of ACS, DOC, DOE, BOC and too many other agencies, advocates and providers to mention. As we continue to implement raise the age and transition youth to Horizon, we have also benefited from the guidance and support from our state oversight agencies, SCOC and OCFS. OCFC and SCOC have been reviewing video of incidents and have commended Correctional Officers' restraint during incidents and their use of Safe Crisis Management approved techniques.

This transition period has been challenging and ACS staff and DOC staff are continuously working together and modifying procedures, improving practices, and adding new resources as needed. DOC staff are working hard to prevent and address any incidents that arise in the facility. As we have seen this week, transitions are also often challenging for adolescents, particularly those who have experienced trauma.

I am going to take this time to update you on the programming ACS is providing and coordinating.

Addressing Group Disturbances and Ensuring Safety

As you know, this first week has been a transition for everyone involved. As you have likely heard, there have been some group disturbances and in some instances DOC staff were injured, including this past Saturday.

ACS and DOC have taken a number of steps to increase the safety of the youth and the staff.

This includes:

- Re-deployed 4 ACS program counselors to help with morning transition, to help motivate youth to attend school and to help with moving youth from the housing unit to school.
- Improved communication and operational coordination among ACS and DOC staff through roll call meetings and presentations by program staff to familiarize DOC officers with the support role they can fill.
- Staggered the recreation staff so we have recreation staff from 7:00 am to 9:00 pm.
- Received approval to addressing physical plant issues in the classrooms, cafeteria and clinic to enhance safety. Improved the movement of youth through the facility by decreasing the size of groups.
- Working to minimize disturbances at night through strategies such as shutting off phone access after 9:00 PM so youth using the bathroom cannot also use the phone.

Notably, it is important to mention that SCOC and OCFS, our oversight agencies, have been on-site to offer assistance/suggestions on safe response strategies. This has been invaluable.

ACS Programming and Staff

A team of ACS staff, DOE staff and contracted health and mental health staff ensure youth at Horizon receive education, health care, mental health services (including psychiatric and psychological care), dental care, recreational activities, and case management onsite. ACS staff include case managers, a recreational director, programming staff, a chaplain, a youth engagement

specialist/ombudsman, food service staff, property management staff, housekeepers, facility managers and senior leadership all working at Horizon alongside the DOC staff. In addition, ACS has contracted mental health and health services on-site at Horizon, including psychiatrists, psychologists, a creative art therapist, clinicians, 24-hour medical staff and part time dental staff.

The ACS Program Staff organize activities, run groups and coordinate with our full array of after school and weekend programs. Much of their work now is focused on community building. Horizon has a gym and a courtyard. The outdoor recreation area is still under construction. Physical fitness is being provided in the gym and on the units at this time. Of utmost importance, we have built a portfolio of engaging positive youth development programs through community-based organizations providing a digital music program, life coaching, visual arts, entrepreneurship, digital animation, African drumming, chess, culinary arts, barbering, CPR, music and performance though Carnegie Hall and many others.

All youth at Horizon receive hot, healthy meals each day.

Education:

Youth in Horizon and Crossroads attend the NYC Department of Education's (DOE) District 79 Passages Academy, a full time educational program that is operated by DOE across our entire juvenile justice residential continuum. We opened a new educational wing at the Horizon's school focusing on youth pursuing their high school equivalency and/or college.

Prior to the transition of youth from Rikers to Horizon, the Horizon principal and several teachers visited the youth at Rikers to introduce themselves and begin the process of engagement. Last week, ACS added three program counselors in the mornings to help motivate youth to attend school.

Health and Mental Health Care

ACS contracts with the Floating Hospital to provide medical services to all resident youth at Horizon. These health services includes an initial examination, a comprehensive physical examination, daily medication, sick call examinations, incident follow-up, optical examinations and general dentistry examinations.

Because of delay in the distribution of medication to the youth, ACS and DOC are reviewing our medication protocol to ensure residents receive their medication timely, before they need to leave for court.

All residents had dental examinations prior to leaving Rikers Island and there was no follow-up needed. The dental suite at Horizon is not yet completed but will be in the coming weeks.

Mental health staff at Horizon have worked with the residents to develop “safety plans.” And I am glad to report that by the end of law week, all youth at Horizon had a safety plan. These plans help youth and staff better understand their triggers and protective factors and are a critical component of the behavior management work for the residents.

Earlier this year, ACS announced that we entered into a partnership with Health + Hospitals, who is helping support and manage the contracted health care providers currently working at Crossroads and Horizon. This is a first step toward ensuring continuity of care for young people throughout the juvenile justice system, from detention through placement and aftercare, and continuing as needed after they are released.

Family Engagement

Central to our work is the belief that the best way to positively influence youth is to strengthen their connections to family and community.

Core to ACS's mission of protecting children from harm, we strive to ensure that youth in facilities only have contact with positive adults, family members and peers, so our case managers work collaboratively with parents/guardians and youth at intake to identify a list of appropriate contacts/visitors. Case managers at Horizon spent the week prior to the transition reaching out to the guardians and parents of detained youth to provide information on the transition and to update our approved contact lists. Approved contacts are pre-programmed in the automated phone system, and youth may call any of these pre-approved contacts at any free time period daily, except during off-hours, between 9pm and 5am, and when in school. Our secure facilities offer visiting hours five days a week, including weekdays, evenings and weekends.

Finally, the residents of Horizon are encouraged to correspond with their families. Each resident has an approved list of individuals to whom they can send and receive letters and ACS case managers provide the youth with the supplies, including paper, pens, envelopes and stamps.

Laundry and Cleaning

Upon arrival at Horizon, all youth receive a clean uniform. A distribution protocol for laundry and uniforms has been developed so that the residents have clean uniforms and laundry service. ACS and DOE are working together to develop an incentive program to use with the youth to help engage them in cleaning their housing units.

Update on Variances:

- 1) Law Library: BOC granted a limited variance with conditions including providing Horizon youth have access to Lexis/Nexis through tablets for at least 2 hours per day/7 days a week; having a legal coordinator on site at Horizon 5 days per week/20 hours per week; and providing monthly reports on compliance.

ACS has secured the tablets and the procurement contract for Lexis/Nexis has been signed. The tablets with Lexis/Nexis should be at Horizon soon. In addition, ACS has contracted with Friends of Island Academy to provide the legal coordinator, who should also be on site

very soon. We have immediately re-deployed an ACS attorney, Elsa Pearson, with youth experience to assist youth with legal research and print out documents.

- 2) Phone Calls: As I mentioned previously, the automated telephone system has been installed at Horizon. We appreciate the limited variance with conditions BOC previously provided and are pleased to say that the variance is no longer necessary.
- 3) Nursery: ACS and DOC are pleased to submit our nursery plan to BOC today. As you will see, we will be procuring wraparound services to pregnant and parenting mothers and fathers. We anticipate this short-term small purchase solicitation to be in place by January and in the longer term issue an RFP. Services will include Nurse-Family Partnership, parent coaching, a fatherhood program, Teen Choice sexuality education, and consultation. ACS and DOC have also developed a protocol to alert BOC of the admission of a pregnant girl within 3-days while preserving the youth's legal right to confidentiality.
- 4) Dry Cells: ACS has had a state of the art system installed that allows youth to alert staff that they need to use the restroom or get water during the night. The youth flips a switch that turns on a light and alerts staff that the young person needs attention. DOC staff know that they have no more than 5 minutes to escort the resident to the bathroom. Soon the time log will be automated and coupled with cameras. In the meantime, this is logged manually.

Conclusion

As you can see, the staff of ACS, DOC, DOE and our contractors are working around the clock to not only provide for the safety and the security of the youth at Horizon, but also to ensure their health, mental health, education and well-being are being addressed. This has been very challenging; nevertheless, we are deeply committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of ACS and DOC staff at Horizon. We look forward to continuing to work with BOC as we continue to implement the historic Raise the Age legislation.