

DISTRICT OFFICE
254 East 4th Street
NEW YORK, NY 10009
(212) 677-1077
FAX: (212) 677-1990
CLRivera@council.nyc.gov



CITY HALL OFFICE
250 BROADWAY, ROOM 1808
NEW YORK, NY 10007
(212) 788-7366
FAX: (212) 442-2738

CARLINA RIVERA
COUNCIL MEMBER, 2nd DISTRICT
CITY OF NEW YORK

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Testimony to the December 16 Meeting of the New York City Board of Correction

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony this evening. I am here once again to call on the Board to abolish solitary confinement, in all forms, in City jails. The Board of Correction must seek alternatives that respect the safety and humanity of all incarcerated people instead of the piecemeal reforms before us today that will not protect the lives of every New Yorker. Fifteen days of solitary confinement is 15 days too many, and the Board needs to remove exceptions to the standards for solitary.

We all know the unnecessary tragedy that Layleen Polanco experienced during the last nine days of her life in solitary confinement, where she ultimately died from complications that could have been prevented. Should that appalling example not be sufficient for our case, you might consider studies that have shown solitary to be unjust and inhumane. *The New York Times* analyzed nearly 60,000 disciplinary cases¹ in New York and found that black inmates were 65 percent more likely to be sent to solitary confinement compared to white inmates. Solitary cannot continue, in any form, given the widespread evidence that it causes severe and long-lasting psychological, emotional, and physical harm². We heard of its devastating impact loud and clear at the last hearing from formerly incarcerated people, family members of currently incarcerated people, legal experts, faith leaders, and community members.

I would also like to note the absence of the Department of Correction (DOC) at the previous hearing on December 2. The DOC's failure to engage at the past hearing leaves me with serious concerns about their intentions to carefully consider the proposed changes and the lived experiences of survivors of solitary.

As a city that aspires to uphold progressive and inclusive ideals, New York City must honor the rights of all people who are incarcerated. Policy alternatives to the BOC's proposal already exist: I strongly urge the Board of Correction to adopt the HALT Solitary campaign's blueprint to end the practice. The evidence against its continued use is simply too compelling and the stakes too high. Therefore, we must pursue the alternatives before the system experiences another tragedy.

Thank you.

¹ https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/03/nyregion/new-york-state-prisons-inmates-racial-bias.html?_r=0

² https://www.utdallas.edu/news/2015/3/31-31472_Criminologist-Challenges-the-Effectiveness-of-Solitary-Confinement-Story-Wide.html