



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian Benjamin

State Senator Brian A. Benjamin to Outline 2018 Criminal Justice Priorities

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(New York, NY) - As the 2018 Legislative session approaches, State Senate Brian A. Benjamin held a rally today with activists and community leaders to outline his criminal justice priorities for 2018.

“As New Yorkers are well aware, Rikers Island represents some of the worst aspects of New York State's criminal justice system. When I visited the facility shortly after being elected, I met people from the community I represent—a number of whom didn’t belong there in the first place,” **said Senator Benjamin**. “Expediting the closing of Rikers will force us to deal with important issues such as bail reform, speedy trial reform, and discovery law reform.

As a result, I am calling on Governor Andrew Cuomo and my fellow state legislators to include closing Rikers Island in the upcoming Fiscal Year 2019 Budget and make this a priority for New York State.”

Nine out of ten people being held behind bars in New York City are either Black (55%) or Latino (34%). The majority are from low-income neighborhoods, and most of those jailed come from just five neighborhoods—the South Bronx, Brownsville, East New York, Harlem, and Bed-Stuy.

“Why is it that we are willing to spend over \$270,000 per inmate per year—\$700 a day—to keep young men and women from our community locked up, but we are not

willing to spend that money to actually invest in the community in CURE Violence programs?” **said Benjamin**, “We need to have a candid conversation about the purpose of jails and incarceration. How are we defining who is a threat to society? I think that needs to be revisited.”

“Take the money that you’re wasting on cages and bring it back to our communities. Bring some hope, and some jobs, and some books, and some resources, and maybe even some food! Invest in us,” **said Iesha Sekou of Street Corner Resources**. “The people in our community are the people to do this work.... Activism is about doing something that’s in your power. It’s about more than believing something. It’s about seeing each other. It’s about teaching someone. It’s about being there.”



STRIVE, a Harlem program for youth aged 18-24 who have been touched by the criminal justice system, brought with them a young man named Justin Echevarria. In March, Justin graduated from STRIVE’s Future Leaders program, and STRIVE assisted him in obtaining a job at Old Navy while he attends City Tech part time to obtain his Bachelor’s degree in Computer Science. The support and training that programs like STRIVE provide to at-risk youth, places them on a positive path and helps them

successfully enter the job market. If New York State is truly interested in improving the lives of youth in low income communities of color, it would spend more money on programs like STRIVE, and less money incarcerating young men and women.

Vidal Guzman of JustLeadershipUSA said,

We can't let any more time pass without taking real steps toward closing Rikers. There is no redeeming Torture Island. There is only one solution: shut it down. Our New Year's resolution is to work even harder to keep elevating the voices of directly impacted people to achieve our ultimate goal: #CLOSERikers."

Senator Benjamin, who is the Ranking Member on the Senate Committee on Civil Service and Pensions, recently introduced legislation to divest the New York State public pensions from private, for-profit prisons. "By their very nature, private, for-profit prisons drive the inhumane practice of incarcerating low income people of color," **said Senator Benjamin.**

If we are serious about reforming our criminal justice system, then we have to recognize we are betting against ourselves by using our public pensions to reward private prisons for this behaviour. There is no reason a progressive state like New York should be benefiting from mass incarceration; passing this bill would not only be the right thing to do morally, it would benefit society economically."

"We commend Senator Brian Benjamin in introducing Closing Rikers in his top legislative priorities in order to invest the overwhelming amount of funds that go into this flawed system into the impacted and underserved communities in New York City. New Yorkers should not have to suffer the terrible conditions of incarceration which create irreparable scars and destabilizes families and communities" said Anthony Posada, Supervising Attorney of the Community Justice Unit at The Legal Aid Society. "Instead of profiting from the mass incarceration of the disproportionate people of color through money bail and other systems, that money should be going into community-based programs like the Cure Violence program which is a part of the New York Crisis Management System. We applaud Senator Benjamin for leading on these issues for a fairer and freer New York and we urge for its swift passage."



Benjamin, who established himself early on as a leader in criminal justice reform by sponsoring the bill to close Rikers Island in three years, is also a co-sponsor of bills to reform discovery, end cash bail, restore the voting rights of parolees, and end solitary confinement. This rally was the next step in his campaign for a fairer and freer New York and a criminal justice system that focuses on rehabilitation rather than one that erects lifelong barriers to success for the people of New York.

###

related legislation

[2017-S6747](#)

-
- Introduced

- - In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate
- - On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate
- - Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate
- Delivered to Governor
- Signed By Governor
-

[Relates to the closure of the Rikers Island correctional facility within 3 years](#)

June 15, 2017

In Senate Committee [Crime Victims, Crime and Correction](#)

Sponsored by [Brian Benjamin](#)

Do you support this bill?

[**2017-S7194**](#)

-
- Introduced
 - - In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate
 - - On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate
 - - Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate
 - Delivered to Governor
 - Signed By Governor
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[Relates to prohibiting the investment of common retirement funds in private prisons](#)

December 28, 2017

In Senate Committee [Civil Service and Pensions](#)

Sponsored by [Brian Benjamin](#)

Do you support this bill?

2017-S3579

-
- Introduced
 - In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate
 - - On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate
 - - Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate
 - Delivered to Governor
 - Signed By Governor

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[Enacts the "bail elimination act of 2018"; repealer](#)

January 24, 2017

In Senate Committee [Codes](#)

Sponsored by [Michael Gianaris](#)

Do you support this bill?

2017-S505

-
- Introduced
 - In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate
 - - On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate

- - Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate
- Delivered to Governor
- Signed By Governor
-

[Requires applicants for public assistance to be fully informed that they may be liable to reimburse the state for benefits received](#)

January 03, 2017

In Senate Committee [Social Services](#)

Sponsored by [Ruben Diaz](#)

Do you support this bill?

[**2017-S4784**](#)

-
- Introduced
 - - In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate
 - - On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate
 - - Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate
 - Delivered to Governor
 - Signed By Governor
 -

[Restricts the use of segregated confinement and creates alternative therapeutic and rehabilitative confinement options](#)

March 01, 2017

In Senate Committee [Crime Victims, Crime and Correction](#)

Sponsored by [Kevin S. Parker](#)

Do you support this bill?

subscribe

Aye

Nay

2017-S3549

-
- Introduced
 - In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate
 - - On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate
 - - Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate
 - Delivered to Governor
 - Signed By Governor
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[Relates to the creation of an office of special investigation within the department of law](#)

January 24, 2017

In Senate Committee [Investigations and Government Operations](#)

Sponsored by [Andrea Stewart-Cousins](#)

Do you support this bill?

subscribe

Aye

Nay

2017-S960

-
- Introduced
 - In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate
 - - On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate

- - Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate
- Delivered to Governor
- Signed By Governor
-

[Relates to voting and registration for voting by convicted felons](#)

January 05, 2017

In Senate Committee [Elections](#)

Sponsored by [Leroy Comrie](#)

Do you support this bill?