



NEW YORK STATE SENATE  
ALBANY, NY 12247

ALESSANDRA BIAGGI  
SENATOR

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor of New York State  
State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Honorable Bill de Blasio  
Mayor of New York City  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

April 3rd, 2020

Dear Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio,

As of April 2nd there were a [reported](#) 231 incarcerated individuals and 223 correctional facility staff who tested positive for COVID-19 on Rikers Island. We fear that by the time you receive this letter there will be many more. As we have watched COVID-19 rapidly spread across New York, you both have rightfully taken drastic measures to mitigate the impact of the virus to vulnerable communities who are at greater risk of dire complications, through social distancing and other methods of reducing population density. As state and city representatives for Rikers Island, we demand that the same level of precaution and care be afforded to our vulnerable incarcerated constituents, as well as to the correctional officers and staff serving the facility, who are in just as much danger as the rest of us.

We are glad that as of March 27th, the Governor announced the release of 1,100 inmates serving sentences for technical parole violations – which includes 600 people held on Rikers. We are also grateful that as of March 31st, Mayor De Blasio announced the release of 900 incarcerated individuals who were serving time for minor, non-violent offenses, bringing the City's jail population to the lowest we have seen since 1949. It is critical that the City and State continue to review the cases of the remaining individuals, and release as many as possible to further reduce the population density on Rikers Island. Dr. Ross MacDonald, Chief Medical Officer for the NYC Correctional Hospital Services, [echoed this call](#) to protect the safety of vulnerable inmates.

We urgently implore New York City and State to work together in conjunction with their respective Departments of Corrections, to create and implement a comprehensive emergency plan to continue reducing

jail population density, and protect vulnerable incarcerated individuals and employees on Rikers Island during the coronavirus pandemic.

We request the following safety measures be implemented immediately:

1. **Satellite testing facility established on Rikers Island** to test for cases of COVID-19 among the jail population, including correctional officers, guards, and other facility staff, to effectively monitor the growing cluster as was done in New Rochelle and on Long Island.
2. **Continue the immediate and supervised release in all possible cases for vulnerable incarcerated individuals.** Vulnerable individuals include elder inmates, individuals who are immunocompromised, pregnant women, people with chronic health conditions, and individuals with asthma or other forms of respiratory health problems, who are more susceptible to severe complications if they contract COVID-19.
3. **Formal suspension of the practice of incarcerating parolees for technical violations,** to reduce jail population density and the number of individuals cycling into our jail system, and maintain safe social-distancing protocols within correctional facilities.
4. **Guaranteed access to health professionals and medical treatment** for all incarcerated individuals under mandatory or precautionary quarantine, or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.
5. **Guaranteed access to tele-communication methods for incarcerated individuals** to connect with their loved ones for the duration of the in-person visitation suspension, including regular phone calls, teleconferencing, and free stamps.
6. **An immediate moratorium on non-violent, “quality of life” arrests** – such as graffiti, unlicensed street vending, public urination, etc. – in order to reduce the number of individuals cycling into our jail system, and prevent the further spread of the virus throughout our jails, courts, and precincts.

To ensure the health and safety of incarcerated individuals, correction officers and staff in the wake of this public health emergency, we urge you to take immediate action.

As other states and nations have taught us, and as we begin to witness in our own backyard, flattening the curve is a race against the clock – failure to act quickly will have fatal consequences.

Sincerely,



Alessandra Biaggi  
New York State Senate, District 34



Costa Constantinides  
New York City Council, District 22

CC:

Cynthia Brann  
Commissioner, New York City Department of Correction

75-20 Astoria Blvd.  
East Elmhurst, NY 11370

Anthony J. Annucci  
Acting Commissioner, New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision  
1220 Washington Ave #9  
Albany, NY 12226