



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

## Independent Democratic Conference & Advocates to City: Clock is ticking to take our kids off Rikers Island

JEFFREY D. KLEIN April 18, 2017

| ISSUE: [RAISE THE AGE, CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM](#)



*IDC celebrates passage of Raise the Age and urges City to plan quickly*

New York, NY — Senators Jeff Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester), Jesse Hamilton (D-Brooklyn), Jose Peralta (D-Queens), Tony Avella (D-Queens), Diane Savino (D-Staten Island/Brooklyn), Marisol Alcantara (D-Manhattan), joined by Akeem Browder and criminal justice advocates, called on the city to plan to remove juveniles from Rikers Island within a year as required by recently passed Raise the Age legislation

The new legislation requires the city to remove all 16- and 17-year-olds currently held at Rikers Island to specialized juvenile detention facilities by April 1, 2018, to the extent practicable, but no later than October 1, 2018.

“This year’s passage of Raise the Age comes with an especially important aspect that will ensure that 16- and 17-year-olds are removed from Rikers Island as quickly as possible. Though there have been reforms there is no question that the best course of action to protect young vulnerable New Yorkers is to keep them off Rikers Island. By moving them into appropriate facilities we can focus on rehabilitation rather than incarceration,” **said Senator Jeff Klein.**

“Passing Raise the Age took our collective determination. Determination that young people receive the opportunity to get on the right track and become productive New Yorkers. Determination that our justice system turn away from an unjust and unwise course and turn towards compassion and common sense. And determination that we honor the victims of a system that brutalized our fellow New Yorkers, like Lywan Reed, and honor the memory of those who we have lost, like Kalief Browder. We take that same determination and turn it toward seeing Raise the Age through in full. That means insisting that the City honor the timeline our legislation sets out and remove 16- and 17-year-olds from Rikers within the next 12 months. Raise the Age is an important milestone, we remain focused on the milestones ahead and upholding values that will make for a more just justice system in New York State,” **said Senator Jesse Hamilton.**

“Violence seems to be the common denominator at Rikers Island. The jail complex is a harsh environment for anyone, and this is particularly true for 16- and 17-year-olds. I am very glad that we, at the Independent Democratic Conference, were able to deliver Raise the Age in this year’s budget. Under the agreement, teenagers who are currently jailed in the troubled facilities will have to be transferred within one year to age appropriate facilities. In 2017,

there is no excuse to incarcerate adolescents with adults, especially 16- and 17-year-olds who are simply awaiting trial,” **said Senator Jose Peralta.**

“As the Chairman of the Committee on Children & Families, I made Raise the Age my top priority and vowed that this would be the year we accomplished it. After holding the first public hearing dedicated solely to this issue and hearing testimony from every side of the justice system I knew this was something that needed to happen immediately. I am incredibly proud of the IDC for working to get Raise the Age included in this year’s budget and not allowing it to fall by the wayside. Getting children off Rikers Island is a great first step in instituting this legislation. I cannot wait to see the lives of families across the state improved as a result of raising the age,” **said Senator Tony Avella.**

“Since I first started advocating for Raise the Age in 2011 it has been far too long that youthful offenders found themselves in the adult criminal justice system. It is our responsibility to give our youth a fighting chance for their future, and this starts with removing 16- and 17-year-olds from Rikers Island as quickly as possible. In this year's budget, we took the first steps in ensuring we change lives for the better and I will continue to advocate for reforms that do so,” **said Senator Diane Savino.**

“I am proud of my role in finally Raising the Age of criminal responsibility in New York. Out of all the achievements in the state budget, this one is close to my heart. It is especially important to me that the budget contains a first step to closing Rikers Island. Moving current 16- and 17-year-old inmates to a juvenile detention center by 2018 will show advocates and our communities that New York is serious about reforming a criminal justice system that can be cruel, arbitrary, and disproportionately harsh to people of color,” **said Senator Marisol Alcantara.**

The treatment of 16- and 17-year-olds on Rikers Island has recently come under fire from advocates and prosecutors. A 2014 report by United States Attorney Preet Bharara found that those under 18 experienced 1,057 injuries.

Currently, there are approximately 150 children incarcerated at Rikers Island each day.

“The deepest change begins with New York changing the age of criminal responsibility acknowledging that our kids are just kids and deserve to be treated better than the treatment given to my brother Kalief Browder. I thank Senator Klein for changing this law to remove all children from Rikers next year and acknowledge that this fight has only just begun. My work isn't finished just yet,” **said Akeem Browder, Founder of The Kalief Browder Foundation and the Campaign to Shut Down Rikers.**

“Citizens’ Committee for Children is grateful to the members of the Independent Democratic Conference for their commitment to ensuring legislation to raise the age of criminal responsibility was included in this year's budget agreement. Notably, the legislation requires that no youth be placed on Rikers Island after October 1, 2018, but encourages the City to expedite this process to April 2018. Removing all children from Rikers cannot come soon enough,” **said Jennifer March, Executive Director, Citizens Committee for Children.**

“The passage of the Raise the Age bill by both houses of the legislature represents a quantum leap forward in achieving a more humane and equitable juvenile justice system, which would not be possible without the leadership of Senator Klein and Senator Hamilton. The National Act Network has advocated and worked for several years on New York State’s raising the age of criminal responsibility. Tens of thousands of children will now be given the opportunity to have their non-violent offenses handled in family court. With the removal of kids on

Rikers Island and other adult facilities to a more sensible and reasonable system of supervision, we have achieved a critical threshold in dismantling the school to prison pipeline and preventing the recidivism of our children,” **said Kirsten John Foy, Northeast Regional Director of National Action Network.**

“Over the past decade, research on adolescent brain development and on recidivism have confirmed the moral truth that kids should be treated like kids,” **said Laurie Parise, Executive Director of Youth Represent.** “Youth Represent thanks Senator Hamilton for his leadership in this critical step towards protecting 16- and 17-year-olds from some of the most devastating effects of adult prosecution and incarceration. Thanks to this legislation, more kids will be treated like kids, and fewer will face eviction, deportation, and the lifetime stigma of a criminal record. And for the first time, thousands of New Yorkers will have the opportunity to seal criminal records and move on with their lives. We are proud to be part of the movement for comprehensive juvenile justice reform, and we congratulate the young people and their families who have been at the forefront of the Raise the Age campaign. We also look forward to continuing to work with Senator Hamilton to expand life-changing protections to more young New Yorkers.”

“This legislation is an important first step to a better system of justice for children, who should not be judged by adult standards. Thank you Senator Hamilton and Senator Klein for your leadership in this effort. We hope that this is the first of many steps to keep minors out of the pipeline to prison that ensnares too many young people,” **said Jeanette Zelhof, Executive Director, MFY Legal Services.**

“The Fortune Society congratulates the Governor, Senate and Assembly members and the advocacy community that has worked so hard to reach this day of celebration. We now have

joined the rest of the country in recognizing that children need to be treated differently than adults. We are especially grateful that young people will soon be removed from Rikers Island, and that there will be opportunities to seal their records to give them futures far brighter than they would have been before this legislation,” **said JoAnne Page, President and CEO of the Fortune Society.**

“The RTA bill is a hugely progressive and vastly innovative step in the direction of a justice system that aims to be not punitive but reparative. Like the historic shuttering of Rikers Island, it puts New York in the forefront of the movement to radically revise our broken justice system,” **said Dr. Baz Dreisinger, Founding Academic Director, Prison-to-College Pipeline.**

“New York State has, at long last, raised the age of criminal responsibility. It is an imperfect reform. *All* children – no matter what they are accused of – remain children, and *none* should be subjected to the adult criminal justice system and the often lifelong consequences of a criminal record. But despite its imperfections, the recent law is an important step forward, particularly its mandate that children be removed from Rikers Island. As the federal court monitor recently reported, Rikers remains a place defined by violence and depravity. And as Chief Judge Lippman’s Commission recently reported, its problems are endemic and cannot be fixed. We praise the Mayor for agreeing with this, and the Legislature and Governor for insisting that children be removed from Rikers by the fall of 2018. But 18 months is a very long time, particularly in the life of a child. The children on Rikers should be removed as expeditiously as possible. Decency demands no less. We praise Senator Klein and all the other leaders, both in and outside government, whose hard work brought us to this point. Now we must finish the job,” **said Craig Levine, Director of Policy Reform, The Bronx Defenders.**