



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian Benjamin

#CLOSErikers

BRIAN BENJAMIN December 8, 2017

| ISSUE: RIKERS, CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM, CORRECTIONS



Senator Benjamin and Community Partners Discuss the Effects of the Facility in Harlem Town Hall

(New York, NY) - In the wake of the horrific Thanksgiving Day violence at Rikers Island, New York State Senator Brian A. Benjamin (D-30) hosted a community forum in Harlem on the effects the facility has on the community he represents.

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 in New York. Additionally,

the majority of those jailed come from just five neighborhoods—the South Bronx, Brownsville, East New York, Harlem, and Bed-Stuy.

“As New Yorkers are well aware, Rikers Island represents the worst aspects of New York State's criminal justice system, which is why introducing legislation to close Rikers was one of the first actions I took as your Senator. When I visited the facility shortly after being elected, I met people from the community I represent—many of them young men and women being punished for their poverty and their mental health as much as for their crimes. That has to stop,” said Senator Benjamin. “Just last week, the deep-seated culture of violence and inhumanity that pervades Rikers resulted in another senseless attack. In response, I sent a letter to the State Department of Correction calling for a probe into the unacceptable violence at Rikers and for assistance in speeding up the closure of the facility. If we want real justice and real reform to our criminal justice system here in New York, we need to start here at home in New York City by closing Rikers.”

"Tonight, we saw the community come together for an honest and powerful conversation about the challenges facing Harlem," said Vidal Guzman of JustLeadershipUSA. "We're spending \$270,000 per year to cage our brothers and sisters on Rikers Island. We can do so much better than this. The Mayor owes it to us to help us do better. At our Harlem Town Hall, the message is clear: take the money you're wasting on tearing our families apart and use that money to invest in us and in our communities, instead. We're not going to live in fear any longer. We will not accept what you're doing to Harlem."

In addition to Vidal Guzman and representatives of JustLeadershipUSA, the forum featured Iesha Sekou of Street Corner Resources, Omar Jackson of SAVE Program, and Anthony Posada of The Legal Aid Society Community Justice Project.

“We has to ask ourselves, what are prisons for? And why is it that we’re willing to spend two and a half billion dollars keeping young men and women from our community locked up, but we’re not willing to spend that money to actually invest in the community, so that people don’t end up in Rikers in the first place? We need to spend that money on programs like CURE Violence, which can actually reduce crime,” said Benjamin, “and until we do so, and until we close Rikers we won’t be able to end mass incarceration. Our criminal justice system is criminal. It’s broken. If you’re on the wrong side of this, you’re on the wrong side of history. This matters.”

Programs that use the CURE Violence Model, like the SAVE Program, stop the spread of violence by using strategies associated with disease control. With input from community members, they detect and interrupt conflicts and identify those most at risk for treatment, such as help with an addiction, assistance navigating difficult personal situations, and education on the effects of violence on the community.

“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 these chairs 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.”

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 town hall 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?

NAY

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?

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
-

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-S5005

-
- 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 discovery requirements and procedures; repealer

March 03, 2017

In Senate Committee [Codes](#)

Sponsored by [Jamaal T. Bailey](#)

Do you support this bill?

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
 -

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?

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?