



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Alessandra Biaggi

SENATOR BIAGGI CALLS ON NYS AND NYC TO IMPLEMENT EMERGENCY PLAN TO PROTECT THE HEALTH OF INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS AND CORRECTIONS EMPLOYEES ON RIKERS ISLAND AMID COVID-19 PANDEMIC

ALESSANDRA BIAGGI March 19, 2020

BRONX, NY – Yesterday, two cases of COVID-19 were confirmed on Rikers Island. Today, State Senator Alessandra Biaggi, who represents Rikers Island, calls on Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio to work with the New York City and State Departments of Corrections to create and implement an immediate emergency plan to reduce jail population density, and protect vulnerable incarcerated individuals and employees on Rikers Island against the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Senator requests the following safety measures be considered:

- **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. Access to testing should also be made available to incarcerated individuals across all State and City correctional facilities.
- **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.

- **Suspension of the practice of incarcerating parolees for technical violations**, to reduce jail population density and maintain safe social-distancing protocols within correctional facilities.
- **Guaranteed access to health professionals and medical treatment** for all incarcerated individuals under mandatory or precautionary quarantine.
- **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.
- **An immediate moratorium on non-violent, “quality of life” arrests** – such as graffiti, public urination, etc. – in order to prevent the spread of the virus throughout our jails, courts, and precincts.

State Senator Alessandra Biaggi (D-Bronx/Westchester) issued the following statement:

q

“Yesterday, two confirmed cases of COVID-19 were reported at Rikers Island, posing a serious threat to the entire jail population, and the employees and corrections officers who work there. In the last week, we have seen COVID-19 spread rapidly across New York, and state and local governments take drastic measures to mitigate the spread of the virus to vulnerable communities who are at greater risk of dire complications. That same level of precaution must be afforded to vulnerable incarcerated New Yorkers who are in just as much danger as the rest of us. New York City and State must take immediate action to reduce jail population density and protect those most susceptible to the disease, by suspending the practice of incarcerating parolees on technical violations and releasing older and vulnerable incarcerated individuals in all possible cases with supervision. As other states and nations

have taught us, flattening the curve is a race against the clock – failure to act quickly will have fatal consequences.”

According to the [New York City Council](#), there are currently over 900 people held in jails on Rikers Island over the age of 50. At least two-thirds have chronic medical conditions, around 300 are held on a parole warrant, around 200 are held on bail, and 75 on a city sentence. There are approximately 5,400 inmates on Rikers Island.