

# The Women's Center for Justice:

## A Nation-Leading Approach on Women & Gender-Expansive People in Custody

"The women and gender-expansive people at the Rose M. Singer Center on Rikers Island have suffered from trauma and neglect both within the facility and from policies made outside of it... These mothers, sisters, and daughters deserve better. There must be expanded, gender responsive decarceration resources and a humane, accessible standalone facility for those who remain."

*Senators Julia Salazar and Cordell Cleare and Assemblymembers David Weprin and Michaelle Solages,  
Letters to Governor Kathy Hochul and Mayor Eric Adams, May 10, 2022*

### Who is at the Rose M. Singer Center (Rosie's)?

The Rose M. Singer Center (Rosie's) on Rikers Island is the jail for nearly all women and gender-expansive people in NYC.

- Harlem, the Bronx & East New York/Brownsville are the top zip codes for Rosie's admissions over the past 5 years.<sup>1</sup>
- 70% are mothers/primary caregivers.<sup>2</sup>
- 49 to 97% are victims of intimate partner/ family violence.<sup>3</sup>
- 82% were receiving treatment for mental illness, compared to 49% of men.<sup>4</sup>

### Problems with NYC's Current Plan to Close Rosie's

The city's plans to close Rikers is the same or worse for women and gender-expansive people at Rosie's. It would relocate them to a new Kew Gardens facility, connected to a men's jail, opening in 2027. Problems include:

- Keeping Rosie's open for another 5 years.
- Failing to fully prevent women and gender-expansive people from being exposed to men – and possibly to their abusers – and retraumatized.
- Long commutes for families from Harlem, the Bronx and Brooklyn, which have highest admissions to Rosie's.
- No plans to operate Kew Gardens in a gender-responsive way.

### Lincoln: More Accessible, Readily Available & Cheaper

The closed Lincoln Correctional Facility at West 110<sup>th</sup> Street can be transformed into a gender-responsive, healing center that is separate from men.

- *Accessible to visitors.* There are several subway and bus routes near the building that would make it easier for visitation and maintaining community connections.
- *Accessible to community-based providers.* Harlem is home to many community-based service providers that specifically serve justice-involved women and families including Exodus Transitional Community, Greenhope Services for Women, and Osborne Association.
- *More Readily Available.* Recent renovations of Horizon and Crossroads took 17 months, while Kew Gardens is estimated to take at least 5 years.
- *Less Expensive.* Recent renovations of Horizon and Crossroads juvenile cost \$500/sq ft. less than estimated new construction at Kew Gardens.

<sup>1</sup> Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. Provided May 2022

<sup>2</sup> Among more than forty women facing criminal legal charges in New York City in July 2019 and January 2020 interviewed by the Columbia Justice Lab, 70% were caregivers. Bruce Western, [Unpublished data], "Rikers Island Longitudinal Study," Columbia University Justice Lab.

<sup>3</sup> Conversations with providers from SHERO and The Women's Project 2022; notes on file with authors.

<sup>4</sup> NYC Department of Corrections, Custody Snapshot, April 19, 2022; Urban Justice Center, "Brad H. Discharge Planning Services," Mental Health Project, 2021, Retrieved from <https://mhp.urbanjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2021/08/Discharge-Planning-Handout-2021.pdf>.

## Women's Center for Justice

Until the day that New York City is willing to decarcerate all women and gender-expansive people, there should be an accessible, humane center that is separate from men and reduces harm, rather than exacerbating it.

NYC needs a better plan focused on decarceration & transforming Lincoln into a Women's Center for Justice that breaks the traditional punitive approach to jail and focuses on Reentry at Entry—therapeutic support, family unification and skills building. The Women's Center for Justice would incorporate the following:

- Individualized, Gender-Responsive Needs Assessments & Plans. Gender-responsive needs assessments and individualized care plans for programs and services.
- Coordinated, Integrated Care Teams. A coordinated team, including social workers, attorneys, medical and mental health professionals, peer counselors, and community-based providers would, in consultation with family members or caregivers, implement individual's needs plans and provide a continuous care after release.
- Centering Community Partnership. Spaces for local civic groups, social service providers, nonprofits, arts groups, and other organizations to serve community inside and outside of the center.
- Staffing & Service Model. Managed by clinicians, social workers, non-profit organizations, and peers- a successful model that has been used in NY's *Close to Home* initiative for youth. Staff uses a social work approach. The Department of Correction's presence limited to securing the perimeters.
- Privacy, Autonomy & Normalcy. The design would emphasize privacy and preparation for successful reentry. For example, there should be private bedrooms and bathrooms and avoidance of institutionalized physical features.
- Strengthening Family Connections. The Center should have family-friendly visitation programs and child-friendly spaces that allow for human contact and offer some privacy. The Center should provide on-site family programming and services including parenting classes, therapy and support for children and their caregivers.