May 10, 2022

Dear Governor Hochul,

The women and gender-expansive people at the Rose M. Singer Center (RMSC) on Rikers Island have suffered from trauma and neglect both within the facility and from policies made outside of it.

There are fewer than 300 women and gender-expansive people currently at Rikers—4 percent of the population—yet they are scheduled to be among the last groups to leave as the complex closes. Under the city’s plan, they would be moved to a Kew Gardens, Queens’ facility connected to a men’s jail, opening in 2027. Some of the shared spaces include an entrance, gym, and culinary arts space. An estimated 77 percent of women at RMSC are domestic violence survivors, and these common spaces risk exposure to their abusers, and re-traumatization. Kew Gardens does not comply with best practice recommendations for full sight and sound separation between women and men in correctional settings.

The borough-based jail plan to relocate these individuals to a Kew Gardens facility where they would share the same spaces and staff as men, would create the same or worse conditions than at Rikers. In October, some at RMSC were moved to Westchester to address the humanitarian crisis at Rikers, only to be returned without any improvements to safety precautions or long-term well-being.

These mothers, sisters, and daughters deserve better. There must be expanded, gender-responsive de-carceration resources and a humane, accessible standalone facility for those who remain. Former Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, Head of the Rikers Commission and the Mayor’s Social Justice Commission have called on the State to transfer Lincoln to the City for this purpose.

As Governor, we strongly urge you to create a safer solution by securing a site that is centrally located, more readily available, and separate from men, such as Lincoln in Harlem.

1 A New Path to Justice: Getting Women off Rikers Island Vera Institute of Justice, November 2018.
Lincoln could be transformed into a Women’s Center for Justice—a new model that uses holistic care and breaks the cycle of incarceration by focusing on the unique needs of women, gender-expansive people, and their families. With this approach, New York could be a national leader in safety and justice for women and set the stage for closing the rest of Rikers.

Sincerely,

Senate

Julia Salazar  
NYS Senator  
Senate District 18  
Chair, Crime Victims, Crimes and Corrections Committee

Cordell Cleare  
NYS Senator  
Senate District 30  
Chair, Women’s Issues Committee

Assembly

David Weprin  
NYS Assembly Member  
Assembly District 24  
Chair, Committee on Corrections

Michaelle Solages  
NYS Assembly Member  
Assembly District 22  
Chair, Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislative Caucus