



Four City Council members demanded an investigation based on the account of former Rikers Island (pictured) social worker Justyna Rzewinski, who said officers often marooned some detainees in those units for weeks or even months. TODD MAISEL/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

POLS RIP 'DEADLOCKING' AT THE CITY'S JAILS OF MENTALLY ILL DETAINEES

BY GRAHAM RAYMAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Four City Council members have decried a practice by city jails of locking severely mentally ill people in their cells for extended periods, dubbed "deadlocking."

The Council members – Sandy Nurse of Brooklyn, Tiffany Caban of Queens, Mercedes Narcisse of Brooklyn and Deputy Speaker Diana Ayala (Bronx, Manhattan) – demanded an investigation based on the account of former Rikers Island social worker Justyna Rzewinski as first detailed in the Daily News.

"The reports of people with severe mental illness at Rikers Island being 'deadlocked' are alarming and demand immediate action from the administration and Department of Correction," the four Council members said, calling it a form of solitary confinement.

Rzewinski, who worked in special mental health units for 10 months ending in September, said officers often marooned some detainees in those units for weeks or even months, causing them to decompensate. She told The News and the Board of Correction that the lock-ins were not documented.

"This was totally unethical and inhumane," she told The News. "It happens in every MO unit and PACE unit on Rikers Island," Rzewinski added, referring to Mental Observation and Program to Accelerate Clinical Effectiveness units that are supposed to add a higher level of care for the mentally ill.

Mayor Adams and city Correction Commissioner Lynelle Maginley-Liddie have repeatedly denied solitary confinement exists in the jails. And Adams and Mayor Bill

de Blasio before him repeatedly renewed executive orders suspending elements of the minimum standards that govern jail treatment.

In July, Adams refused to implement elements of Local Law 42 intended to ban solitary confinement. The mayor cited safety and security concerns and called it a "state of emergency."

"The reality is that medical staff are reporting being blocked by [Correction Department] officials from providing essential medical care, further exacerbating the already critical mental health crisis on Rikers Island," the Council members said.

"These barriers to care have led to extreme conditions, including uncontrollable screaming and individuals smearing their cells with feces. Disturbing reports indicate that health care workers who have raised concerns are being met with retaliation."

Rzewinski worked in MO and PACE units in the George R. Vierno Center, a jail at Rikers Island.

"These reports must be thoroughly investigated, and the administration must begin implementing Local Law 42 of 2024 rather than pursuing emergency declarations that exacerbate the crisis on Rikers," the Council members said.

Rzewinski's comments before the Board of Correction on Tuesday drew calls from board members for further investigation.

"These allegations are damning, especially to hear they are being used punitively. I propose we really dig further into this," said Correction Board Vice Chairwoman Helen Skipper, a City Council appointee.



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