

My name is Patricia Tsai and I am here to represent the Lin Sing Association.

The slogan “close Rikers” should not be treated as synonymous with “moving out of Rikers Island”. Even if we concede that the existing prison at Rikers is beyond reform and must be shut down, there is no compelling reason why you cannot tear it down and build a brand new complex there, with all the modern features and facilities that criminal justice reform experts deem necessary to restore humanity to detainees.

So why the sudden rush to destroy 4 local communities in congested city centers by erecting skyscraper jails in their midst? The city’s argument seems to pivot on two components.

First, access to the island. City officials repeated stated that being on Rikers makes family visits difficult. What they didn’t mention is that the NYC Ferry route to Soundview (opened on August 15, 2018), which bypasses Rikers Island, **is** less than a ten minute ferry ride from 90th Street and the East River and less than a five minute ferry ride from Soundview, in The Bronx. Extending the NYC Ferry Soundview Route to Rikers Island would transform transportation access there. Ferry boats could make direct connections from existing docks in The Bronx and Manhattan, and transfers could be made from Queens and Brooklyn.

Second, the costs of shuttling detainees between Rikers and the courts. City representatives contend that there are considerable transportation costs to be saved by moving to city centers because courts are located there. What they don’t tell you is that however considerable these transportation costs are, they will not in a million years amount to the \$11 billion price tag of the proposed projects.

We reject the spurious claim that criminal justice reform requires changing the physical location of detention centers at Rikers. Skyscraper city jails are flights of fancy by idealists, architects, and interior designers, a gift to the real estate and construction industries, but not a “necessity” for criminal justice reform because a brand new complex can be built and the humanity of detainees restored right there on Rikers Island.

Improvements of New York’s transit system, education system, shelter system, crumbling roads and bridges, these are “necessities”. If the mayor has \$11 billion, which is twice of what President Trump requested from Congress to build a national wall on the border with Mexico, let him spend it on the real needs of New Yorkers and not on flawed policies that end up hurting people and waste taxpayers’ money.

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