

## Written Statement for Borough President Hearing, 06/11/2019

My name is Patricia Tsai and I am here to represent the Lin Sing Association, a 119 year old association located on historic Mott Street in the heart of Chinatown. The association has thousands of members and is comprised of 18 separate organizations, each of which has at least 80 years of history. Most of our members are local residents, business people, and seniors. Lin Sing counsels, supports, translates, and advocates for our community.

As we have stated from the beginning, real prison reform involves reforming the culture of the criminal justice system and the people who manage prisons, not the concrete walls or land that house prisoners. Change of physical location is not the solution.

Corrections facilities statewide have been shuttered and auctioned off as crime rates drop. Why is Mayor De Blasio building skyscraper jails in congested city centers?

City officials repeatedly cited the Lippman Commission's recommendation to dismantle Rikers and move to the city. Yet the Lippman Commission recommends multiple SMALL jails which are intended to become part of the local community. The commission never called for mega surveillance structures which overshadow existing local buildings, overwhelm local housing and small businesses, and disrupt local traffic and way of life. How are detainees supposed to be integrated into local communities when the city creates pernicious conditions which pit one against the other from the very outset?

City officials also stated that being on Rikers makes family visits difficult. What they don't tell you 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.

City representatives contend that there are considerable transportation costs to be saved by moving to city centers because courts are located there. 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. Simply shuffling detainees around by replicating four Rikers in the city does no justice to the incarcerated because it creates a false appearance of improvements in their conditions while taking resources away from urgent substantive reform.**

As a proposal, city skyscraper jails are highly suspect in the manner in which the city rushed through SCOPING and EIS and consolidated separate developments in four boroughs into one single ULURP process, **which effectively deprives the public of critical scrutiny over the plan's actual effectiveness and potential harm, as well as exploration of fiscally more responsible alternatives.**

**It is immoral** to undertake such mammoth construction projects without due diligence, such as properly assessing the risks of unsafe construction, soil condition, shifting foundations, sewage capacity, the dangers posed to surrounding buildings, harm to local residents, etc.

**It is immoral** to stigmatize criticism and demonize opposition by sugarcoating development projects of dubious public benefits as a moral imperative and public good, and demand disproportional sacrifices from minority communities for **sham justice reform**.

**Real criminal justice reform** begins with reforming case processing, sentencing, bail, changing the laws, and strengthening diversion and preventative mental health programs across the city, the successful implementation of which are expected to lead to speedy adjudications and reducing the number of inmates. **Progressive criminal justice reform ends with less demand for prison beds, not more monuments of mass incarceration!**

We urge Borough President Brewer to hold the city accountable by demanding that the process be rolled back, specifically, restart SCOPING and EIS with full community engagement as well as accurate site address (not 80 Center Street as a stand-in for 125 White Street) and abide by the democratic principle of one review process per construction site. Thank you.

**Lin Sing Association**

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