



Women's Community Justice Association

January 25, 2022

The Honorable Helene E. Weinstein
Chair, Standing Committee on Ways and Means
LOB923, Capitol Building Albany, NY 12248
wamchair@nyassembly.gov

The Honorable Liz Krueger Chair,
Standing Finance Committee
Room 416, CAP, Capitol Building Albany, NY 12247
financechair@nysenate.gov

**Testimony of the Women's Community Justice Association
Support A Standalone Facility for Women at Rikers & Reentry Services**

Submitted to the Joint Legislative Budget Hearings on Public Protection, Human Services, and Local Government

Dear Chairperson Weinstein and Chairperson Krueger,

The Women's Community Justice Association (WCJA) is a non-profit dedicated to improving the lives of women and gender-expansive New Yorkers impacted by mass incarceration. In 2018, WCJA launched the #BEYONDrosies campaign to advocate for those at the Rose M. Singer jail (Rosie's) on Rikers Island.

Women have different pathways into the criminal legal system and divergent needs from men, but they have often been treated as an afterthought. The plan to close Rikers Island would relocate all women and gender-expansive people to a Kew Gardens, Queens facility that is attached to a men's jail opening in 2027.

On October 13, 2021, Governor Hochul announced that women would be temporarily transferred from Rosie's to state prisons in Westchester. This increased the urgency to secure a more readily available standalone facility, and to invest in community-based support for women and gender-expansive people.

#BEYONDrosies is advocating for a new plan to permanently close Rosie's before 2027, reduce the population to under 100, and secure a standalone facility for those who remain. The New York State legislature can support the effort by:

1. **Supporting the state transfer of a closed/underused correctional facility in Manhattan** to the city for a standalone, humane and more readily available site for women and gender-expansive people.
2. **Increasing state funding for women's transitional housing in New York City** to promote successful reentry and break the cycle of incarceration.

Securing A State-Owned Facility for Women

Contact: Michelle Feldman, Campaign Director Michelle@wcja.org

The city's borough-based jail plan would relocate all women and gender-expansive people to a new Kew Gardens, Queens jail that is attached to a men's building and opens in 2027. The Kew Gardens facility replicates harmful conditions that made Rosie's among the 12 worst jails in the nation for sexual assault, and separated families with long commute times.

#BEYONDrosies is calling for a new plan, endorsed by former New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, for the state to transfer a closed or underused state prison in Manhattan— Lincoln, Edgcombe, or Bayview Correctional Facilities—to the city for women and gender-expansive people.

This could be a Center for Women's Justice—a facility with gender-responsive services provided by non-profits, with the Department of Corrections securing the perimeter. It would use a "reentry upon entry" model, focusing on trauma-informed care, family unification and skills building. The spaces and programming would be child-friendly and promote safety, dignity, and justice.

The state owns the sites and must transfer one of them to the New York City Department of Corrections. We urge state legislators to help facilitate this process.

These are among the few locations zoned for correctional facilities in New York City. Manhattan is where the greatest number of those at Rosie's have been charged and locating the facility there would keep them closer to their families and communities. In addition, the three buildings could be renovated, while the Kew Gardens facility would require new construction, saving taxpayer money and shortening the timeline for relocating the women.

When the City Council approved the borough-based jail plan, it agreed to explore the feasibility of a more centrally located, standalone site for women. Former Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer endorsed Lincoln as a standalone site for women in her recommendations for the city's 2019 borough-based jail plan.

The state has a role to play in ending the crisis at Rikers and delivering justice for those at Rosie's by transferring one of the Manhattan facilities to the city.

Increasing State Funding for NYC Women's Housing

Successful reentry for women is critical for reducing the population at Rosie's and in state prisons. Housing is the foundation for a stable life. Having a safe place to call home allows for family unification, employment, and access to support services.

It is estimated that several hundred women return to New York City from state prison each year. New York State should increase investments in housing support for these women. In December 2021, the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) released a Request-for-Proposals to fund transitional housing for people on parole. The RFP included funding for only 3-10 beds for females in New York City—a drop in the bucket of the tremendous need.

The legislature and DOCCS should expand transitional and permanent housing resources for women returning to communities in New York City. This is an investment that will reduce crime, decrease incarceration, and strengthen outcomes for mothers and children.

Contact: Michelle Feldman, Campaign Director Michelle@wcja.org