

## TESTIMONY ON CONDITIONS AT RIKERS

*This testimony was written based on an interview with a person incarcerated at Rikers Island, who remained anonymous to protect himself from retaliation. It was presented at a New York City Board of Corrections meeting by Kristen Brown and Fleming Smith, students with the NYU Solitary Confinement Project, which works in partnership with the Urban Justice Center's Mental Health Project to bring testimony about solitary confinement and jail conditions from people in Rikers to the Board of Corrections. It includes discussions of self-harm.*

It's been seven months since I've been given any of the medication that I need. On the outside, I took it every day. AMKC has not given me my medication period.

Growing up, I had trouble with reading and writing at school. My parents divorced when I was really young. At age 15, I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Until 2008, I was often in and out of the hospital. I struggled with addiction, and when my mom and my grandfather passed away from COVID-19, I started using again.

I had trouble getting my medication from the day I was arrested. When they transferred me from EMTC to AMKC, they gave me my medication for four or five days, then nothing. At first, I couldn't sleep. Since then I gained sixty pounds. It gets terrible. It gets much worse than you expect. I had a gentleman that tried to commit suicide in my dorm for the simple reason that they don't give us medication. When I was in EMTC, I had a lot of suicide attempts. I tried to finish myself. Doctors would come and talk to me, officers would watch me, but no help after that. They don't take anything seriously. They don't give us a reason for stopping the medication. The only reason that they give us is the following: we're short on staff. That's the only answer we've been given all this time.

I had COVID-19 symptoms 2.5 months ago. They didn't care. We had no masks, we were sleeping in a dorm with 50 people, sleeping 2 feet away from each other. Sometimes we'd have to use towels as masks. You have people coughing on top of you, you have people sneezing on top of you. You have people going crazy on top of you. They really didn't care. They don't help us with medical attention, nothing.

The only help I got was from other people in my dorm. Without them, I would have been another number on the COVID-19 death list. This here is the worst out of the worst place that anybody could be in. We don't go out to the yard, we don't get gym, we don't get anything. Once we found a mouse inside a mashed potato. Another time there were cockroaches inside bags of potato chips we bought

from the commissary. That's the food we have to eat. There's no toilet tissue. They tell us, do what you have to do, but there's no toilet tissue here.

Staff here is very poor, to the point where they might see inmates fighting other inmates and not get involved. This is the worst jail in NYC. No one cares about anybody. Here, you have to learn about surviving on your own. It's like being in the desert. Once I get upstate, it's different. They provide us better medication, better quality of services.

We want people just to know that we're human beings, not just a dog out here where they say, we forgot about this person. Here, we need better staff, better training for them. There needs to be an emphasis on mental health. Since May, I haven't received any treatment. I filed a grievance, but I never got a response. They only really respond if people incarcerated are aggressive or violent against guards. Everybody's been trying, my family's been trying, I've been trying. I've been trying to write letters to everybody, to write and write and write.

I was recently sentenced to five years in state prison. At my hearing, I told the judge about the situation with my medication. At the bottom of the form, she wrote a note and signed it saying I should be getting my medication. Nothing changed. They didn't even respond to that.

We want somebody to help us and hear our voices. To make ourselves understandable. We don't want to just be left behind. We're just praying every day that there's somebody trying to help us out there, trying to hear our voices.

This ends the testimony. Thank you for listening. I yield my time.