

Members of the Board of Correction  
New York City Board of Correction  
51 Chambers Street, Room 923  
New York, NY 10007

Re: Proposed Amendments to the Minimum Standards

Dear Chairwoman Simmons and Mr. Wolf:

My name is Beverlynn Anderson. I am 51 years old and have been incarcerated at Rikers Island two times, once for 3 days and once for seven months relating to my addiction. I was getting high for 42 years.

I was released in November 2004. CASES (an alternative to incarceration program) came in to meet me and really rescued me. I passed through eighteen different crisis centers in every borough until they could find me some stable housing. June 6, 2005, I finally got an apartment. Since then, I have completed many trainings and programs: substance abuse and HIV training, Solutions for Wellness, CASES, Howie the Harp and CCA Crossroads. I am currently looking for a job doing peer advocacy for people leaving jail and prison with mental illness.

#### Living Conditions

When I first came in, I guess during the initial evaluations, they put me in a room full of females. I had to fight. Some guard strong-armed me, really hurt me, then I found out the girl that fought me was his girlfriend.

Next they put me in a cell with no window. That was really horrible.

I have been in MO and GP dorms and they both have too many problems. In the MOs we didn't move, go anywhere or do anything. The doctor comes and the food comes to you.

When I was in the GP dorms, girls would steal food from the kitchen and hide it so the staff would search everybody. That's really beneath me, making everybody strip. But I had no commissary so they eventually left me alone.

In those big dorms, I would have to watch people hang themselves. The guards would finally come in and take them to the "crazy house" but it shook us all up.

#### Mandating Everyone Wear Uniforms

I think making people wear uniforms is just to prisonerize them. If the problem is that people are stealing clothes, uniforms will not make people steal less. People steal things period: clothes and jewelry, commissary, your underwear. Your recommended change to uniforms is just going to make people who already feel bad feel worse. The effects are going to be very horrible.

The problem is that Rikers does not do a good job communicating with people on the outside what the regulation colors are or how many pairs of underwear we could have. I had two pairs for seven months. We would have to wash these things ourselves and then guard them as they dried.

#### Food

The food they serve is just unhealthy. I have never eaten so much starch in my life. I also got to see how they prepared food when I worked in the kitchen and witnessed people getting high on motrin and tea bags.

#### Health Problems

I am disabled and suffer from seizures and lots of problems. I was taking nine medications so jail just did not work for me. I went three months without medication. Right when I got locked up, being off my medication combined with the food that they gave me, I went seventeen days without going to the bathroom. I did not know what was going on but was finally able to see a doctor.

#### Court Appearances

It was almost time for me to get out—my shoes had worn out from working in the kitchen so they gave me boots that were two sizes too big and took my laces—who knows why? I was going to court looking like this plus my whole head had turned grey. It was embarrassing. I think I went to court 40 times without getting to see my lawyer—they call it bullpen therapy.

Your recommendations do little to address the problems currently plaguing Rikers Island. The conditions—whether it be the overcrowded dorms, food or poor medical treatment—are horrible.

Sincerely,

  
Beverlynn Anderson

Testimony taken by Alison Brill, Cardozo School of Law.