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April 16, 2007

Ms. Hildy J. Simmons, Chair  
Mr. Richard Wolf, Esq., Executive Director  
New York City Board of Corrections  
51 Chambers Street, Room 923  
New York, NY 10007

NYC BOARD OF CORRECTION

APR 17 '07 PM 4:03

Re: Proposed Amendments to the Minimum Standards

Dear Chairwoman Simmons and Mr. Wolf:

We write as members of the New York City community to express our concern about the Board's proposed revisions to the Minimum Standards, and to request that these proposals be withdrawn. The Minimum Standards have a profound impact upon the lives of the men and women held in City jails, and upon the lives of their friends and families as well. We are deeply troubled that the Board is proposing changes to these rules without conducting a full and fair process and, in particular, without having first asked members of the community for input.

We care about the treatment of detainees and inmates, and we view the suggested changes as a step backward for the standards of community decency. We are particularly concerned that the revised standards would increase crowding, increase the number of people subjected to 23 hour cell lock-in, reduce translation services to non-English-speaking inmates and detainees, deny inmates and detainees contact visits with their families and friends within the first 24 hours of their stay, and allow jail staff to listen in to phone calls and to read or censor mail without a warrant. These provisions will lead to more overcrowding, more violence and more suicides in our City jails.

The men and women in City jails are part of our community and they deserve to be treated with dignity. It is unconscionable that, in the absence of any crisis, any "comprehensive" revision of the Minimum Standards should have been undertaken without more consideration of the needs of inmates and detainees. This is especially true when one considers that three quarters of the individuals in City jails are there awaiting trial and have not been convicted of a crime, and that many are there because they and their families could not afford bail.

The thousands of men and women held in City custody and all New Yorkers deserve better than you have offered. The Board's proposed revisions to the Minimum Standards should be withdrawn.

Sincerely,

  
Rima Vesley-Flad