GIVE EVERYONE LEAVING RIKERS AN ID CARD TO ACCESS JOBS, HOUSING, AND MEDICATION

While the city government has its own ID program (IDNYC), New Yorkers in city jails cannot apply for identification upon release. Without an official government-issued identification card, it can be nearly impossible to apply for employment, housing, or many government benefit programs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, people have been released from Rikers Island without access to ID cards and as a result have been unable to pick up medication or sign up for public benefits. Mayor de Blasio has sold IDNYC as a victory for inclusion, but the program fails thousands of justice-involved New Yorkers each year. Mayor de Blasio must force the Department of Correction (DOC) and Human Resources Administration (HRA) to print IDNYC cards for all individuals on Rikers Island.

Mayor de Blasio, DOC Commissioner Cynthia Brann, and Department of Social Services (DSS/HRA) Commissioner Steve Banks can make sure that every single New Yorker leaving Rikers Island has access to an IDNYC card. No new laws are needed if executive actions are taken.

➔ Email and call the Mayor asking him to take executive action to provide IDNYC to people leaving Rikers.
➔ Contact the Department of Correction and the Department of Social Services to demand the same.
➔ Share posts on Twitter and Instagram tagging @NYCMayor, @IDNYC, @CorrectionNYC, and @NYCHRA. Tag @JustReentry and we’ll amplify your messages.

During the pandemic, New Yorkers released from Rikers face severe health risks and homelessness without access to IDs. All of us are asked to show ID in our day-to-day lives to meet basic needs. But New Yorkers released from Rikers Island, some of our most vulnerable neighbors, are not provided with identification cards that would enable them to access housing, medication, and other critical services.

- During the pandemic, a time when access to health services is paramount, people transitioning from Rikers did not have IDs to pick up medication from pharmacies. Exodus Transitional Community, which operates the city’s temporary hotel-based shelters for people released from Rikers during the COVID-19 pandemic, has made over 100 trips to pharmacies to pick up medication on behalf of clients. Without ID cards, Exodus clients struggle to apply for jobs, rent apartments, and enroll in educational programs.
Lack of IDs hinders community activists' efforts for temporary housing, too. At the peak of the pandemic, New Yorkers came together to donate into bail funds to release people detained at Rikers Island on cash bail. While organizers attempted to provide temporary housing for those released in hotels, ID cards were required to check into hotels and many individuals were turned away.

DAILY NEWS

SPREAD THE WORD: Share this New York Daily News op-ed about IDs for justice-involved New Yorkers written by Julio Medina, a coalition member who leads Exodus Transitional Community.

It is easier to get an IDNYC card leaving state prisons than city jails. The Human Resources Administration (HRA), which is in charge of the IDNYC program, accepts temporary identification issued by the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) to ensure people leaving state prisons can obtain IDs. The identity of every single person incarcerated in New York City jails is verified through the arrest and intake process, and the NYC Department of Correction (DOC) already creates ID cards for each person that they must use while they are incarcerated. Yet NYC HRA and IDNYC do not accept these documents as verification of identity.

The city was close to taking action pre-pandemic. DOC and the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ) were discussing bringing IDNYC to Rikers Island before COVID-19 shut down NYC. Instead of speeding up implementation, efforts stalled. In fact, all IDNYC enrollment centers throughout the five boroughs have remained closed during the coronavirus pandemic, preventing all New Yorkers from accessing this critical resource. In addition to beginning IDNYC enrollment on Rikers Island, the Mayor should designate these employees as essential.

City government is already prioritizing other public institutions for IDNYC outreach. IDNYC partners with the city’s three public library systems and dozens of cultural institutions to expand membership. Pop-up enrollment events take place at public hospitals operated by NYC Health + Hospitals, the same agency that oversees Correctional Health Services on Rikers Island. Even middle schoolers over age ten can access IDNYC. If our city schools and city hospitals can link New Yorkers to this critical resource, so can our city jails.

It can be difficult for people who are incarcerated to gather documents and apply for ID cards through traditional routes, such as the DMV. Acquiring an ID card from the state’s Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) requires documents like birth certificates, social security cards, and bank statements that those struggling with housing stability do not have and can take many weeks to acquire. That is why expanding IDNYC services to work with justice-involved people on Rikers, and accept documentation from DOC, is so critical.