

# Criminal justice reform and public safety priorities for New York City's next leaders

In 2022, New York City will welcome a newly elected mayor, Manhattan District Attorney, Public Advocate, Comptroller, and City Council. As these leaders shape a new vision for our city, Vera urges them to adopt four key criminal justice priorities.

New Yorkers want to feel safe, and the current cycle of arrest, prosecution, and incarceration actually threatens public safety instead of strengthening it. Even short stays in jail can cause instability, resulting in lost jobs, housing, and child custody, perpetuating cycles of criminal legal system involvement. Investing in community- and evidence-based programs that keep families together and support people in need is the best way to bolster public safety—and at a fraction of the cost of incarceration.

These new decision makers will take office during a humanitarian crisis on Rikers Island and amidst an ongoing pandemic that continues to stretch the city's budget and challenge implementation of the city's current plan to shutter the island's jail complex by 2027. We urge these public servants to take decisive action to reverse our growing jail population, to dramatically increase investment in community-centered public safety interventions, and to lead the state in evidence-based criminal justice policies that consider incarceration a last resort.

**Jails and punishment are not the keys to public safety. The Adams administration must appoint leaders, apportion funds, and support policies and programs that maintain public safety by investing in communities.**

## What should the new Adams administration do?

As the Mayor-Elect Eric Adams identifies priorities, his administration should focus on:

- **Appointing criminal justice reformers to key positions**  
Adams must appoint leaders to the New York City Police Department, Department of Correction, Department of Probation, and Office for Criminal Justice who are unafraid to challenge the status quo and are committed to shrinking, not expanding, incarceration and overpolicing. He also should revive the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety position to spearhead the closure of Rikers Island by 2027 and coordinate a bold public safety strategy that focuses on supporting and investing in communities harmed by mass incarceration.
- **Facilitating closure of Rikers on the city's current 2027 timeline**  
Adams must commit to closing the jail complex and work with City Council, community leaders, and people impacted by mass incarceration to strengthen the existing borough-based jail plan.
- **Investing in community-based public safety programs and services**  
Adams and the City Council must invest in community-based solutions like violence interruption, supervised release, public health interventions, and alternatives to incarceration. It costs more than \$400,000 per year to incarcerate a single New Yorker on Rikers Island. New York City must reallocate at least \$500 million of the \$2.5 billion it spends to jail New Yorkers toward investments that address the harms of mass incarceration and help communities heal.
- **Supporting meaningful criminal justice legislation in Albany**  
Adams must be a champion of and advocate for criminal justice reform, setting the tone for the rest of the state. As Albany looks to protect bail reform, pass parole reform, and tackle other criminal justice priorities, he must lead from the front, offering support and putting a stop to rampart fearmongering that threatens progressive, evidence-based reform.