



For Immediate Release

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TREATMENT NOT JAIL COALITION WELCOMES COMMITTEE SUPPORT OF STATE LEGISLATION TO END THE CRIMINALIZATION OF MENTAL ILLNESS *Resolution 156 moves to a vote of the full council*

NEW YORK, NY – Today, the Treatment Not Jail Coalition welcomed the passage of the New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice’s vote to advance [Resolution 156](#) for a full vote of the city council. The resolution calls on the New York State Legislature to pass, and Governor Kathy Hochul to sign, the Treatment Not Jail Act ([S.1976A/A.1263A](#)).

“Today, the New York City Council took an important step in ending New York’s reliance on the criminal legal system to criminalize, incarcerate and, ultimately, warehouse those in mental health crisis, rather than connect them with the treatment and services they need,” said **Stan Germán, executive director of New York County Defender Services**. “By passing Resolution 156, the Criminal Justice Committee has shown real leadership and a commitment to making our city healthier, more humane, and safer.”

[More than half](#) of the people in New York City jails have been flagged for exhibiting symptoms of mental illness, and the proportion of those incarcerated at Rikers with serious mental illness has skyrocketed in recent years. The Treatment Not Jail Act would off-ramp these individuals from the insidious revolving door of incarceration by opening access to established, efficient and incredibly effective treatment courts, which are proven to [cut rearrest rates in half](#), while [growing employment rates](#) and [saving the state money](#).

“The issue of mass incarceration, as well as substance use and mental illness, is especially pressing for New York City and New Yorkers are crying out for their elected leaders to take action,” said **Assemblymember Phara Souffrant Forrest**, who is the prime sponsor of the Treatment Not Jail Act in the Assembly. “The Treatment Not Jail Act will help address these issues and the root causes of crime by expanding access and eligibility for diversion court programs, which are proven to reduce recidivism and lead to better outcomes for both individuals and their communities. This bill is a common sense measure which will provide individuals with the support that they need, improve public safety, and build stronger and more resilient communities. The legislature must pass it this year to finally begin to offer New Yorkers the solutions they are asking for.”

“Treatment Not Jail is rational and compassionate legislation, and the fact that it is moving through the legislature is evidence of that. We cannot continue to cycle people through our jail system and expect it to yield different results. I’m hopeful we can keep this momentum going

and push for full passage of this life-saving bill before the session ends,” said **State Senator Jessica Ramos**.

Incarceration - even for short periods - is profoundly destabilizing, inherently traumatizing, and [proven to increase the likelihood of rearrest](#). This is especially true for [those with underlying mental health issues](#) who emerge from jail and prison disoriented and disconnected from the vital healthcare, housing and community support they need.

QUOTES:

“New York must stop ignoring and warehousing people with mental health concerns in jails and prisons. The Treatment Not Jail Act provides more opportunities for people with mental health concerns and other disabilities to avoid incarceration and resolve their charges in a more dignified and holistic way that benefits themselves and the community. The current approach is not and will not ever work! We commend the City Council for recognizing that incarceration is not the answer and moving forward with their Mental Health Roadmap. Leadership matters! Now it is time for the state to act swiftly.” **Chaplain Dr. Victoria A. Phillips – Dr. V/Ms. V, Community, Health & Justice Organizing, Urban Justice Center Mental Health Project**

“It has never been more apparent that jail only serves to undermine public safety, including the individual safety and well-being of those trapped in this crisis of Rikers Island,” said **Jeffrey Berman, mental health attorney with the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. “The Treatment Not Jail Act offers an urgently needed pathway to court-mandated treatment for thousands of people who are languishing in jail after entering into the criminal legal system due to a mental health diagnosis, developmental disability, or substance use disorder. We thank the City Council for their support and call on the Hochul Administration, Senate Majority Leader Stewart Cousins and Speaker Heastie to immediately enact this critically important law.”

“Osborne Association is very pleased that the City Council Criminal Justice Committee passed the Treatment Not Jail resolution and we call upon the State Legislature to pass this bill. Osborne is committed to making NYC safer for all, which means ending punitive responses and creating pathways away from the criminal legal system for people with mental health and substance abuse issues. Providing people treatment and supports to live productive lives will benefit us all,” said **Christina Mansfield, Vice President, Health and Wellness at Osborne Association**.

“I spent 25 years cycling through the system with mental health and substance use issues – 25 years gone. I could have been an attorney, an engineer, a scientist or a doctor. Instead, I am directly-impacted by the criminal justice system and considered a 2nd class citizen – all because I didn’t get the support or treatment I needed.” **Helen ‘Skip’ Skipper, Executive Director, or the NYC Justice Peer Initiative**

“People living with serious mental illness deserve trauma-informed, culturally responsive mental health care, not a jail sentence. Mental health courts are an alternative that can treat underlying conditions and break the cycle of incarceration,” said **Matt Kudish, CEO of NAMI-NYC**.