

Candida Brooks-Harrison, President
Juli Kempner, Executive Director

NASW Statement on #CLOSErikers: Campaign One Year Anniversary

[NASW-NYC Chapter has been an organizational partner on the campaign to #CLOSErikers since its inception in April 2016.](#) We joined the campaign for several reasons: 1) because it is a call for basic human rights and dignity pursuant to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and 2) it is part of our mandate as social workers in our Code of Ethics to advocate for the dignity and worth of all persons. In the past year, members have participated in marches, rallies, Lippmann Commission community meetings, calls to action, and in all facets of the campaign. [Just last month, the Mayor announced a ten year plan to close Rikers](#), and on April 2, 2017, the Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform, released its [report](#) calling for the closing of Rikers as an "essential step toward a more effective and more humane criminal justice system."

As a partner with JUSTLeadership on the campaign, we engage our membership in the issues pertaining to the imperative to #CLOSErikers, in a broader context of necessary criminal justice reform. These issues include #RaiseTheAge (another campaign NASW is actively involved in), speedy trial, bail reform, solitary confinement, and others. This is a true activist agenda which calls for immediate reforms and lasting change. It mandates a paradigm shift in how we conceive of, or "re-imagine", a criminal justice system which offers rehabilitation and restorative justice as opposed to punishment. This work on criminal justice reform is focused through a lens of race, diversity and intersectionality, and the disparate impact on communities of color.

Some of the highlights of the campaign in the past year included NASW participation in a march and rally to the entrance of Rikers on 9.24.16, a faith-based vigil at Gracie mansion on 12.4.16, a rally outside the Apollo Theatre at the Mayor's State of the City address on 2.13.17, various actions at Mayor de Blasio fundraising events, Lippmann Commission community hearings and the report release press conference on 4.2.17, and the one-year commemorative rally and [press conference at City Hall 4.24.17](#).

The continuous work of advocates played a central role in changing the Mayor's position on the feasibility of closing Rikers, and will continue to be the driving force in moving the agenda forward. There is no doubt that we have to keep this issue central and keep the public up to date on the proposed timelines, particularly for removing adolescents from the island. Ten years is too long to wait, given the abuses that are still continuing at Rikers. We continue to join the chorus of voices calling for its shutdown, and recommit ourselves to work in all areas that will enable a reduction in the population and its final closure. We know that many of our members will continue to join us in this work.

Legislators and other stakeholders must remain steadfast in the implementation of closing Rikers. Along with campaign partners, we will hold them accountable. As social workers we play a unique and powerful role in this historic move for equity in NYC.