

# A Look Inside the Fiscal Year 2024 New York City Department of Correction Budget

Mayor Eric Adams's preliminary \$102.7 billion budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 maintains astronomical funding for the Department of Correction (DOC), despite the city's commitment to decarcerate, close, and replace Rikers Island with a smaller borough-based jail system by 2027.<sup>1</sup>

Incarceration does not produce safety. Research shows that even 24 hours in detention significantly increases the likelihood of rearrest.<sup>2</sup> Incarceration is also incredibly expensive, costing New York City taxpayers more than \$550,000 per incarcerated person annually.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, New York City's jails are dangerous and often deadly. Thirty-six people have died in DOC custody over the last two years, while thousands more have missed critical medical appointments and faced abhorrent conditions.<sup>4</sup>

Rather than continue to overinvest in a brutal, bloated jail system, Mayor Adams should invest in evidence-based services that deliver the safety New York City needs—targeted especially toward the people at greatest risk of committing and experiencing violence. These proven strategies include supportive housing, supervised release, alternatives to incarceration, summer youth employment, and peer-led mental health crisis response.<sup>5</sup>

## **DOC's budget remains high, driven almost entirely by bloated personnel costs.**

Mayor Adams's FY 2024 preliminary budget maintains steady funding for DOC compared to the FY 2023 adopted budget.<sup>6</sup> Because of severe overstaffing, personnel costs represent 88.5 percent of the department's FY 2024 budget, up from 87.4 percent this fiscal year.<sup>7</sup> In 2022, DOC had approximately 1,500 more corrections officers than people in detention.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, in 2021, the typical American jail had a uniformed workforce roughly one-third the size of its jail population.<sup>9</sup>

Although absenteeism has declined slightly in recent months, DOC's uniformed absence rate remains more than triple pre-pandemic levels at 17.4 percent.<sup>10</sup> This is an outlier compared to other uniformed workforces in New York City, notably almost four times higher than NYPD (4.7 percent).<sup>11</sup> Consequently, DOC wastes millions of dollars on salaries for officers who do not show up to work.

This also means significant overtime spending to cover for absent employees. In FY 2022, DOC quickly exceeded its \$88 million annual overtime budget by spending \$97 million in the first five months alone.<sup>12</sup> Given persistently high absence rates, it seems likely that in FY 2023, the agency will again significantly overspend on overtime. Maintaining DOC's astronomical budget sends the tacit message that this wasteful spending and dysfunction is justified.

## **The city must plan for a rightsized DOC.**

Although the decarceration and construction plans are behind schedule, New York City has a legal obligation to close Rikers Island by 2027, and city leaders must plan for a revamped DOC with staffing proportionate to the smaller jail population.<sup>13</sup> Current projections from the Office of Management and Budget keep DOC uniformed headcounts steady at 7,060 people through the end of FY 2027, suggesting plans to offset natural attrition with significant hiring.<sup>14</sup>

Even without backfilling roles, however, natural attrition is neither fast nor targeted enough to create a workforce equipped to staff the borough-based jails. Neither are mass layoffs a viable option. The city must enable DOC staff to transition to agencies and sectors that provide the same economic opportunity and job security without the trauma of working on Rikers Island. This aligns with Council Speaker Adrienne Adams’s “State of the City,” which recognizes that New Yorkers—particularly those without postsecondary education—need more paths to the middle class.<sup>15</sup>

**Mayor Adams must fund community-based services that deliver safety through support.**

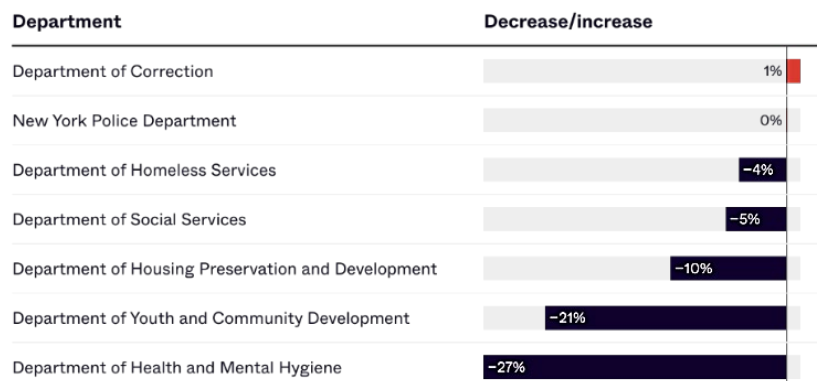
In contrast to DOC’s and NYPD’s modestly increasing budgets, the mayor’s FY 2024 budget significantly decreases funding for crucial city departments. Although much of the funding decrease is due to shrinking federal dollars, New York City nevertheless has a responsibility to maintain or increase funding for these vital agencies that prevent crime before it happens.

We applaud Mayor Adams for investing in “clubhouse” community centers and street outreach teams for people with mental illness, and we urge the administration and City Council to shift more funds to services that proactively keep people out of the criminal legal system—such as supportive housing, summer youth employment, and peer-led mental health crisis response.<sup>16</sup> In Mayor Adams’s words, these are “upstream methods so we don’t wait downstream and pull people out of despair.”<sup>17</sup> The city must also invest in supporting people who already have contact with the criminal legal system, using supervised release and alternatives to incarceration to divert people from cycles of rearrest and incarceration. By helping people address their mental, physical, and emotional needs, these evidence-based services support safety without relying on punishment. It is essential that these programs shrink the footprint of the criminal legal system rather than increase the number of people with ongoing system contact.

**City leaders must act now.**

With public safety in the forefront and the closure of Rikers more urgent than ever, now is a pivotal moment for the Adams administration and City Council to deliver safety while investing in the city’s communities. By reining in DOC spending, then reinvesting savings and committing additional funding to community-based services, New York City can move away from a harmful—and costly—jail-first approach to community safety.

Percentage change in departmental budgets, FY23 to FY24



Vera compared FY23 expected spend as reported in January 2023 to the FY24 preliminary budget. Changes reflect total departmental budgets as well as fringe benefits, pensions, and debt service.

Source: New York City Office of Management and Budget, Vera Institute of Justice

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> New York City Office of the Mayor, “Mayor Adams Releases Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2024,” Press release, January 12, 2023, [perma.cc/C27Q-SJX3](https://perma.cc/C27Q-SJX3). New York City, “A Roadmap for Closing Rikers,” [rikers.cityofnewyork.us](https://rikers.cityofnewyork.us).

<sup>2</sup> Arnold Ventures, *The Hidden Costs of Pretrial Detention Revisited* (Houston, TX: Arnold Ventures, 2022), 4, [perma.cc/4UQV-4S4Q](https://perma.cc/4UQV-4S4Q).

<sup>3</sup> New York City Comptroller’s Office, Budget Bureau, *NYC Department of Correction FYs 2011-21 Operating Expenditures, Jail Population, Cost Per Incarcerated Person, Staffing Ratios, Performance Measure Outcomes, and Overtime* (New York: Comptroller’s Office, 2021), 3, [perma.cc/Q8VF-RPXJ](https://perma.cc/Q8VF-RPXJ).

<sup>4</sup> For deaths, see Jan Ransom and Jonah E. Bromwich, “Tracking the Deaths in New York City’s Jail System,” *New York Times*, February 4, 2023, [nytimes.com/article/rikers-deaths-jail.html](https://nytimes.com/article/rikers-deaths-jail.html); Erica Bryant, “19 People Have Died from New York City Jails in 2022,” December 12, 2022, Vera Institute of Justice, [perma.cc/P5ED-UM72](https://perma.cc/P5ED-UM72); and Michael Wilson and Chelsia Rose Marcius, “16 Men Died in New York City Jails Last Year. Who Were They?” *New York Times*, January 28, 2022, [nytimes.com/2022/01/28/nyregion/rikers-island-prisoner-deaths.html](https://nytimes.com/2022/01/28/nyregion/rikers-island-prisoner-deaths.html). For medical care and conditions, see Jonah E. Bromwich, “Medical Care at Rikers is Delayed for Thousands, Records Show,” *New York Times*, February 1, 2022, [nytimes.com/2022/02/01/nyregion/rikers-island-medical-care.html](https://nytimes.com/2022/02/01/nyregion/rikers-island-medical-care.html); and Julia Lurie, “New Photos Reveal Squalid, Dangerous Conditions at Rikers Island,” *Mother Jones*, October 8, 2022, [perma.cc/JK2R-8WH6](https://perma.cc/JK2R-8WH6).

<sup>5</sup> Thea Sebastian, Hanna Love, Sam Washington, et al., *A New Community Safety Blueprint: How the Federal Government Can Address Violence and Harm Through a Public Health Approach* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 2022), [perma.cc/EE6Z-3W94](https://perma.cc/EE6Z-3W94). For supervised release and pretrial services see, Aiden Cotter and Madeline Bailey, “Successful Pretrial Systems Rely on Supportive Pretrial Services” (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2022), [perma.cc/8EAA-X86Q](https://perma.cc/8EAA-X86Q). For alternatives to incarceration, see Akhi Johnson and Mustafa Ali-Smith, “Diversion Programs, Explained,” Vera Institute of Justice, April 28, 2022, [perma.cc/Q2TM-A3NJ](https://perma.cc/Q2TM-A3NJ).

<sup>6</sup> New York City Office of Management and Budget (OMB), *The City of New York Preliminary Budget Fiscal Year 2024: Expense Revenue Contract* (New York: OMB, 2023), 39E, [perma.cc/ESR5-VXLN](https://perma.cc/ESR5-VXLN).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 39E. Vera’s calculations include overall budget, fringe benefits, pensions, and debt service. To calculate these percentages, researchers divided personnel costs, fringe benefits, and pensions by the total budget.

<sup>8</sup> New York City Comptroller, “Department of Correction (DOC),” Dashboard, updated February 24, 2023, [comptroller.nyc.gov/services/for-the-public/department-of-correction-doc/dashboard/](https://comptroller.nyc.gov/services/for-the-public/department-of-correction-doc/dashboard/).

<sup>9</sup> Zhen Zeng, *Jail Inmates in 2021 – Statistical Tables* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2022), 16, [perma.cc/P6AW-MASJ](https://perma.cc/P6AW-MASJ).

<sup>10</sup> The uniformed absence rate was 17.4 percent in the first four months of FY 2023 compared to 5.7 percent in FY 2019. For DOC absenteeism, see New York City Mayor’s Office of Operations, *Mayor’s Management Report: Preliminary Fiscal 2023* (New York: New York City Office of the Mayor, 2023), 349-50, [perma.cc/F94D-W6BR](https://perma.cc/F94D-W6BR); and New York City Mayor’s Office of Operations, *Mayor’s Management Report Fiscal 2019* (New York: New York City Office of the Mayor, 2019), 353-54, [perma.cc/EQ9N-HKFC](https://perma.cc/EQ9N-HKFC). Furthermore, DOC’s uniformed absence rate in the first four months of FY 2023 was approximately double that of the Fire Department (8.9 percent) and the Department of Sanitation (8.4 percent). See New York City Office of the Mayor, *Mayor’s Management Report: Preliminary Fiscal 2023*.

<sup>11</sup> Rates calculated based on the first four months of FY 2023. See New York City Office of the Mayor, *Mayor’s Management Report: Preliminary Fiscal 2023*.

<sup>12</sup> Office of the New York State Comptroller, *Issues Facing New York City’s Agencies: New York City Department of Correction* (New York: Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2022), [perma.cc/HA5J-KLT7](https://perma.cc/HA5J-KLT7).

<sup>13</sup> Fola Akinnibi, “NYC’s Plan to Close Rikers Behind Schedule in Dispute Over Design Changes,” Bloomberg, October 18, 2022, [perma.cc/BKS6-MJFK](https://perma.cc/BKS6-MJFK).

<sup>14</sup> OMB, *The Financial Plan of the City of New York: Fiscal Years 2023-2027; Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Staffing Levels* (New York: OMB, 2023), 35, [perma.cc/S2T9-QYJ6](https://perma.cc/S2T9-QYJ6).

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin Heller, *Why New York City Needs a Blueprint to Rightsize the Department of Correction* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2022), [perma.cc/73RM-3RNB](https://perma.cc/73RM-3RNB); and Adrienne E. Adams, *2023 State of the City: People Over Everything* (New York: City Council, 2023), 4-6, [perma.cc/R22A-GSQS](https://perma.cc/R22A-GSQS).

<sup>16</sup> Andy Newman and Emma G. Fitzsimmons, “Street Teams and Clubhouses: A New Plan to Help Mentally Ill New Yorkers,” *New York Times*, March 2, 2023, [nytimes.com/2023/03/02/nyregion/eric-adams-mental-illness-plan.html](https://nytimes.com/2023/03/02/nyregion/eric-adams-mental-illness-plan.html).

<sup>17</sup> Tamara Keith, Karen Zamora, and Patrick Jarenwattananon, “NYC Mayor Eric Adams Applauds Federal Help to Fight Crime,” *WNYC*, February 4, 2022, [perma.cc/28GE-KPF8](https://perma.cc/28GE-KPF8).