



POST OFFICE BOX 110034 BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11211

Updates for June 13th

11 May - NYPD Pursued Domestic Terrorism Charges For Jordan Neely Protestors

Two Harlem women who climbed into UES subway tracks temporarily faced the same charges levied against convicted subway shooter Frank James.

MORE:

by Peter Senzamici (*The Patch*)

Police tried to charge two Harlem residents with terrorism after a Jordan Neely demonstration last weekend saw protesters leap onto Upper East Side subway tracks, officials said.

Kiara Williams, 23, and Kimberly Bernard, 33, were arrested Monday and charged with terrorism after Saturday's protest at the Lexington Avenue–63rd Street station, one in a series of demonstrations in the city since Neely died in the chokehold of former marine Daniel Penny, according to officials.

But the terrorism charges — which, for comparison, were also levied against convicted mass subway shooter Frank James — were later dropped, according to the Manhattan District Attorney's Office.

Two others have been arraigned on charges related to the protest.

Devyn Fusaro, 29, and Josephine Perez, 43, who were both charged with felony second-degree assault, obstructing governmental administration and criminal trespass.

Williams, Bernard and Fusaro were released, while Perez posted a \$20,000 bail, officials said.

All others who have been arrested so far in connection to the protest were issued desk appearance tickets, the DA's office said.

Police Seek Even More Protesters For Arrests

On Wednesday, police announced that they are now seeking five more protesters, bringing the total currently sought possibly up to 11 people.

In addition to six unnamed people whose pictures were released Sunday, police say they are now seeking [REDACTED—we're not doing the cop's job for them], wanted for jumping onto the subway tracks at the Lexington Avenue-63rd Street station, and criminal trespassing, the NYPD said.

NYPD officials only said that the five people named yesterday are being sought in connection to a criminal trespass incident.

The subway demonstration mirrored a 1987 subway protest when New Yorkers took to the train tracks in Downtown Brooklyn following the killing of an unarmed 23-year-old Black man named Michael Griffith, who was violently beaten by a group of white men in Howard Beach, Queens.

A photographer who was at the protest 35 years ago told Insider that it felt like history had come "full circle."

Yesterday Mayor Adams slightly reversed course on his prior restraint and spoke directly to Neely's death in a 14-minute live-streamed address.

The Mayor declined to name or refer to Neely's killer — or to even say that the 30-year-old homeless man was killed at all — but instead doubled-down on his plan to lock up more people with mental illness against their will.

By contrast, Penny, whose chokehold was determined to be the cause of Neely's death by the city's medical examiner — officially ruled a homicide a week ago — was briefly detained by police but later released without charges.

No witnesses have yet to describe Neely's behavior prior to his death as violent or directly threatening beyond being disruptive.

Penny held Neely in a blood chokehold for over 15 minutes as bystanders told him the homeless 30-year-old in his grips had surely turned into a corpse.

The DA's office told *Patch* last week that they were still looking into potential charges.

31 May - Atlanta Police Arrest Organizers of Bail Fund for Cop City Protesters

Part of a brutal crackdown on dissent against the police training facility, the SWAT raid and charges against the protest bail fund are unprecedented.

MORE:

by Natasha Lennard (*The Intercept*)

On Wednesday morning, a heavily armed Atlanta Police Department SWAT team raided a house in Atlanta and arrested three of its residents. Their crime? Organizing legal support and bail funds for protesters and activists who have faced indiscriminate arrest and overreaching charges in the struggle to stop the construction of a vast police training facility — dubbed Cop City — atop a forest in Atlanta.

In a joint operation with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, or GBI, Atlanta cops charged Marlon Scott Kautz, Adele Maclean, and Savannah Patterson — all board members of the Atlanta Solidarity Fund — with “money laundering” and “charity fraud.”

The arrests are an unprecedented attack on bail funds and legal support organizations, a long-standing facet of social justice movements, according to Lauren Regan, executive director of the Civil Liberties Defense Center.

“This is the first bail fund to be attacked in this way,” Regan, whose organization has worked to ensure legal support for people resisting Cop City, told me. “And there is absolutely not a scintilla of fact or evidence that anything illegal has ever transpired with regard to Atlanta fundraising for bail support.”

While the Atlanta Solidarity Fund has been a crucial resource for activists facing harsh repression for their involvement in Stop Cop City, the nonprofit predates the movement and has been providing bail funds, jail support, and assistance with legal representation for Atlanta activists since the 2020 Black liberation uprisings.

The fund, a project of the registered nonprofit Network for Strong Communities, has also provided grants to support an array of anti-repression work in Atlanta, including to groups working with unhoused trans youth, Black worker-owned cooperatives, and abolitionist community builders.

“What happened this morning is a terrifying escalation by the state, and a chillingly direct attack on the First Amendment. This is fascist political repression,” Hannah Riley, an Atlanta-based organizer, told me. “Providing mutual aid to people exercising their constitutionally protected rights to protest and dissent is not a crime.”

A public statement from the GBI said that “[a]gents and officers executed a search warrant and found evidence linking the three suspects to the financial crimes.” The warrants for all three arrestees cite “records and reports of certain currency transactions” and “fraudulent, misrepresenting, or misleading activities regarding charitable solicitations.” (“Solicitations” is, of course, not a word, but the apparent misspelling of the word “solicitations” appears on all three arrestees’ warrants.)

A more detailed arrest warrant for Patterson notes that the alleged “money laundering” charge relates to reimbursements made from the nonprofit to Patterson’s personal PayPal account for minor expenses including “gasoline, forest clean-up, totes, covid rapid tests, media, yard signs and other miscellaneous expenses.” Targeting the organizers with a militarized SWAT raid based on such expenditures only clarifies the desperation of law enforcement agencies in going after the movement.

According to the GBI statement, “All three charged will be booked into a local jail and will have a bond hearing scheduled soon.”

Wednesday’s arrests are just the latest in extreme law enforcement persecution of the popular Stop Cop City movement. A total of 42 activists are currently facing state domestic terror charges on the flimsiest of police claims, while three others face hefty felony intimidation charges for distributing flyers that named a police officer connected to the brutal police killing of 26-year-old forest defender Manuel “Tortuguita” Terán.

Kautz, one of the Atlanta Solidarity Fund organizers arrested on Wednesday, had previously shared numerous reflections with *The Intercept* on the Atlanta cops’ extreme repressive tactics. He noted that the indiscriminate arrests and use of state domestic terrorism charges against protesters represented “an unprecedented level of repression” and a “strategy of blatant malicious prosecution.”

It is a vile irony that for his own role in legal support work and rightful criticism of police violence, Kautz is now part of this same pattern of apparent prosecutorial abuse.

In targeting the Atlanta Solidarity Fund, police and prosecutors are attempting to further the groundless narrative that the multifaceted movement against Cop City is a “criminal organization,” enabling profoundly unconstitutional arrests based on no more than association with a resilient anti-racist, environmentalist movement.

Politicians keen to see Cop City built in Atlanta have doubled down on the pernicious line, none more so than Georgia’s Republican Gov. Brian Kemp. “These criminals facilitated and encouraged domestic terrorism,” said Kemp in a statement responding to Wednesday’s arrests, despite the fact that no one has been convicted in the weak domestic terrorism cases.

Organizing bail funds and legal support for protesters facing charges, however serious, is a decades-old social justice movement practice. As the Atlanta Community Press Collective noted on Twitter, “When Dr. King was held in Birmingham Jail, churches and community groups including the NAACP came together to fund his \$4000 bail – the equivalent of \$39,000 today.”

Like the overreaching domestic terrorism charges, if any established legal standards and precedents are upheld in these cases, no financial crimes or money-laundering charges will stick. Yet even unsuccessful malicious prosecutions exact a painful toll on movements, especially when a resource hub like the Atlanta Solidarity Fund is targeted.

“They are trying to drain our morale and trying to drain our resources,” another person associated with the fund told me, withholding their name for fear of police persecution following their associates’ arrests. “These arrests send a message that if you run a nonprofit that they find to be at odds with their colonial project, they will target you.”

The charges indeed risk setting a dangerous precedent in criminalizing bail funds and legal support networks. “Bailing out protestors who exercise their constitutionally protected rights is simply not a crime. In fact, it is a historically grounded tradition in the very same social and political movements that the city of Atlanta prides itself on,” said Regan, the attorney, in a separate press statement. “Someone had to bail out civil rights activists in the 60’s—I think we can all agree that community support isn’t a crime.”

Wednesday’s arrests come just days after it was revealed by reporters that Atlanta officials have known for some time that the cost of building Cop City to the city of Atlanta would amount to at least \$51 million in public funds, instead of the \$30 million that city officials promised since 2021.

Local opposition to the project has been strong, with hundreds of people attending a recent city council meeting to speak out against Cop City during a public hearing. The city council will vote on whether to approve the growing cost of the vast militarized policing facility on June 5. “The charges against organizers of the Atlanta Solidarity Fund come as the public becomes increasingly aware of the corporate funding and interests backing the Cop City project and the Atlanta Police Foundation non-profit,” Nora Scholl from the Atlanta Community Press Collective told me. “Law enforcement agencies are using force and imprisonment against protestors to buffer them from widespread opposition to the project.”

June 6th - Atlanta City Council Votes to Fund Controversial 'Cop City' Project

by Kelly Weill (*The Daily Beast*)

Atlanta City Council members voted early Tuesday morning to fund a controversial police training facility, breaking with hundreds of community members who spoke against the facility throughout the overnight council meeting.

Council members voted 11-4 to fund the project, following more than 14 hours of comments from hundreds of speakers. The funding vote represented one of the best chances at blocking the facility, nicknamed "Cop City" by opponents who decry the project as an expensive and environmentally destructive bid to further militarize Atlanta's police force.

The 5am vote approved over \$30 million in construction costs, plus an annual \$1.2 million—an expected but disappointing outcome for opponents to the facility.

"What meets us in this moment is immoral and undemocratic," Rev. James Woodall, a public policy associate at the Southern Center for Human Rights told council members during Monday afternoon testimony. He and other Cop City opponents have accused the city of rushing the project toward approval, against the wishes of Atlanta residents.

The Monday afternoon session came at an especially fraught moment of the project.

Last month, the Atlanta Community Press Collective revealed that Cop City costs stood to balloon far beyond the city's estimated \$30 million price tag. A Sunday report by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution calculated "the actual cost to taxpayers for the facility is expected to be more than double what officials have continually said," based on a review of public documents. Much of the additional spending comes in the form of annual \$1.2 million payments to the Atlanta Police Foundation, the organization managing fundraising for the facility.

City officials disputed this characterization, claiming the payments are budget-neutral, as Atlanta currently pays a similar annual lease for its current police training facilities.

Speakers at Monday's meeting were also incensed over last week's arrests of three activists who'd run a support fund for Cop City opponents. Prosecutors accused the trio of financial crimes for using the Atlanta Solidarity Fund to buy things like yard signs and camping supplies. The activists' lawyer defended the small-dollar purchases as part of the Solidarity Fund's work supporting the protests, many of which have taken place in a forest that would be cut down to make room for the police training facility.

The arrests inspired criticism from civil rights watchdogs, who connected them to dozens of similarly controversial cases against anti-Cop City activists. More than 40 people have been arrested on domestic terrorism charges in connection to property damage at the proposed construction site. Many of those cases are thinly evidenced, with defendants being arrested based on proximity to the Stop Cop City music festival, or on the basis of having muddy shoes.

In one instance, the crackdowns have turned deadly. In January, police shot and killed activist Manuel Paez Terán, while Terán was in a tent on the site of the proposed construction. Police accused Terán of shooting at them, a claim that has been complicated by a pair of autopsies suggesting that the 26-year-old did not shoot.

Others who testified on Monday and Tuesday said they feared the project would contribute to the over policing of Atlanta's Black community.

One man described taking his young daughter to preschool and observing places where the city's money might be better spent.

"On our way to daycare in the morning, we sing songs as I try to avoid the potholes that have been there for years. I drive by neighbors waiting at bus stops with no benches, no shelters from the rain. We see unhoused neighbors and community members sleeping under makeshift shelters and we see cop cars cruising our neighborhood all day, every day. I've been harassed on more than one occasion by the cops in my neighborhood. They make me feel the opposite of safe," he said.

"Spending \$60 million taxpayer dollars on a new police training facility is the most heartbreaking, reckless, and quite frankly anti-Black thing this city has ever proposed in my lifetime. I cannot believe I'm standing here pleading for you to not spend tax dollars of a Black city to tear down a forest in a Black neighborhood, to increase the policing and caging of more and more Black people."

A woman who said she lives hundreds of feet from the construction site, said the project is already a headache.

"I have been harassed, intimidated, interrogated, and followed, and had to tell an officer to turn off his flashing blue lights because I had to sleep," she testified. The officer, she said, was sleeping in his squad car.

3 Jun - Lamb liberated In Solidarity with Marius and Anarchist Political Prisoners

We are sharing a couple of actions and statements in commemoration of June 11th.

MORE:

We'd seen the lambs many times, we knew, while they were with their mums now, it wouldn't be that long before they fattened up and the farmer sent them to slaughter. The field was easy to access but watchful mums keeping their babies close were hard to catch. Herding them into a corner and closing in we managed to grab one. Picking them up and taking them to safety we hoped their mum would understand that we'd look after them. We wish we could of taken her other lamb and her, the whole herd. They all deserve better than what awaits them. This lamb will get real care and never see the slaughterhouse or be left to die and decay in some field corner.

It is nearly June 11th, so with the freedom of this lamb we want to send love to Marius and all anarchist comrades serving prison. The fight goes on, and we hope that reading about this lamb allows you to feel freedom, even if just for a second.

To Lisa E and the German antifascists. To our Chilean comrades awaiting trial. To the KTB prisoners. You are not forgotten. We keep fighting.

Until we are all free, every cage is empty and every slaughterhouse and prison is up in flames.

June 11th - Statement from Miguel Peralta

Don't give up compas, resist. We are here on the outside thinking about you. We are thinking of all of you. We know how hard it is to be isolated, restricted, watched. We understand that you are fed up with the daily roll call, the ridiculous uniform, the sound of the locks, the food, the prison guards.

I want you to know that we feel the same rage for this bullshit system that separates us.

Sometimes there might not be a smile, but we must not allow them to take away our happiness. I think we are condemned the moment we set foot in prison. They separate us from our loved ones, from the natural world, from our compas, from the struggle, from the moon. Yet there is no other option than to continue resisting to tear down the walls that keep us apart.

The war that you are facing is exhausting, but only you know what that entails. You know it perfectly well. Surely you have your strategies to be free in your daily routine. Don't stop dreaming, don't get discouraged. I hope that these words cause a crack in those prison walls so that we can listen to and read each other's words and thoughts.

I want you to know that you are not alone. Here we are waiting for you. I send you all a warm embrace.

June 11th - Eric King Update from Florence ADX Supermax

Greetings comrades. Let me tell you about this prison, the federal supermax ADX [in Florence, Colorado]. In this joint there are different levels and units with varying levels of physical isolation and communication, but there are things we all experience. Everyone is locked down at least 21 hours a day, at max 24. When you have inside rec you are by yourself in a room without a pull up bar. Outside rec cages are 8 x 10 foot dog kennels surrounded by concrete walls and a chain link roof — a cage within a cage. Unless you are in the pre-release unit (K-A) or long-term elder unit (K-B), you will never be in the same room as another person. And even in those units you only come around your 'group' — which is one to four other people — for inside rec. The other 22 ½ hours are in your cell by yourself. I have been in C-unit, the discipline unit and K-A; there is one other person in my group.

The cells are sparse. Concrete walls and double doors make any communication between convicts very difficult. Cells feature a low concrete bed, an oddly shitty mattress, a concrete desk, concrete stool, and in some units, a shelf above the desk. You never have solo interactions with staff — you are always double-manned with one of them carrying a steel baton, and you're always cuffed behind your back. Depending on the unit, you can get 4–10 calls per month. I've made two 'live-monitored' calls in the past 10 months, but I'm being told that by participating in psychology programs I'll earn a few calls per month. Time will tell. We're allowed five visits per month, all non-contact in a concrete booth over the phone. All visits have to be scheduled in advance, which can be difficult with such restricted communication. I'm the only Anarchist here, but I'm definitely not the only political prisoner. Within this prison there is a group of prisoners the US government has attempted to bury. The general abolitionist community has consented to this, and it's devastating.

The most restrictive unit in the most restrictive prison in America is H-Unit, which is for people on SAMS (Special Administrative Measures). These restrictions are placed by the Attorney General, and they are sickening. SAMS vary per captive, but all entail only being allowed to write to direct blood family and your lawyer. The FBI must read and approve all letters, magazines, and books. Calls are severely limited, live-monitored by the FBI, and reviewed by magistrate judges. These convicts get three showers per week. The vast majority of people on SAMS are Muslim and foreign born. Because their families are in Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, or in Africa, it is nearly impossible to get visits, calls, or mail. These people

will never see their families or home countries again. Their children will get married, have kids, grow old, and they will never know it. If that doesn't make you sick, I don't even know what we're doing here.

Most of these people have never been to America or speak English. They had war brought to them. They were farmers, bakers, engineers, fathers, and husbands, and then US and Western imperialists arrived on their land. Many of these people never harmed anyone, but were entrapped by rivals and US bootlickers. Some were fighting their own governments, some donated money to local charity groups that were later deemed terrorist organizations. Others did attack US "interests," or attempted to. Some of these actions make me really uncomfortable — just like some of the IRA's, Kurd's, and Palestinian actions make me uncomfortable. Just like US drone strikes, missile attacks, and invasions make me uncomfortable. It's only from a place of privilege that I can tell an occupied people how they should fight. The goal is freedom, not being palatable to Western sensibilities. We took to the streets with rage and sorrow when the pigs killed Tortuguita (Rest in Power). How would our hearts burn if they'd wiped out the entire encampment? If they killed 100,000 little Tortuguitas? It's hard and painful to even fathom.

Sometimes, after 10 or 15 years, via lawsuits or legal pressure, people can be released from their SAMS. These people end up in other ADX units or the CMU. The heartbreaking thing about this is that almost all of these fighters get off SAMS and find themselves supportless, friendless. Imagine you go 15 years of being banned from contact and reading material and when you finally are allowed access there is no one there for you to talk to. How heartbreaking that must feel. Think of someone like Richard Reed (Raheem). He did 7 years on SAMS then forced his way to the Life/Elder unit. He will never leave this prison, he will never touch or talk to his loved ones again. No one is standing by him. Everyone has bought into the government's version of events and the idea that if you fight back you no longer deserve love and support, or to feel human. I vehemently reject this idea. No one should ever have to suffer this level of total isolation alone. The government doesn't get to tell me, an Anarchist, who is a good fighter and who is bad. I think we should all keep an open heart to those who resisted the US military machine and shed light on this blindspot in the abolitionist movement. What did Assata say? "It is our duty to fight for our freedom / It is our duty to win / WE MUST LOVE EACH OTHER AND SUPPORT EACH OTHER / We have nothing to lose but our chains."

Lastly, I'd like to give love and solidarity to everyone resisting Cop City in any capacity. It's beautiful to see. Every prison is a cop city. Every prison was once a patch of land with flowers and bugs and wild life. Evil people turned that nature into militarized torture camps. Trees replaced by bars and barbed wire, wild flowers replaced by poisonous gasses. We need to shut down every cop city, past and present. I commend those who dedicate themselves to the liberation struggle.

I'll end with this: Certain Days quoted Kathy Boudin (Rest in Power) in its May calendar page, and I feel it captures our sentiment perfectly. "The meaning of my life has come from being part of a world wide tradition of fighting for a more just and humane world. My ideals give me strength today as well as yesterday and tomorrow." We can all gain so much from our elders. All love and respect to all my Anarchist comrades, state and federal, everyone who has supported any of us in any way. Free Joe-Joe Bowen, Free Kamau Sadiki, Free Oso Blanco, Free Kojo Bomani Sababu!

7 Jun - Eric Adams's New NYPD Units Are Engaged in Illegal Stop and Frisk

When Mayor Eric Adams announced last year that he would revive the NYPD's anti-crime units, critics were concerned because of the units' history of brutality.

MORE:

by Nia Prater (MSN)

They had been disbanded in 2020 following weeks of protests after the murder of George Floyd, as they were frequently subject to complaints of racial profiling and aggressive tactics.

Adams insisted these new Neighborhood Safety Teams would be more skilled and better trained to avoid any possible infringement on the rights of New Yorkers. "We are going to learn from the past so we don't repeat the past, and we will never use, under my administration, any abusive targeting tactics that go after people based on their ethnicity and where they live," he said in an interview at the time.

Now, a new report issued by the department's federal monitor suggests that critics' fears have been validated. In her report, released on Monday, Mylan Denerstein writes that officers with the Neighborhood Safety Teams are stopping, frisking, and searching members of the public at an "unsatisfactory level of compliance," adding that the department's oversight of these tactics is "inadequate at all levels.",

Denerstein's team audited reports and recordings of stops made by the units for six months of 2022 and found Neighborhood Safety Team officers had "reasonable suspicion" for 76 percent of stops, meaning nearly a quarter of stops had been made unlawfully. The report also determined that illegal stops were made at a rate "nine percentage points higher" than the 2020 rate for the department as a whole. Of the people stopped by police in these encounters, more than 97 percent were Black or Hispanic.

Some of those incidents include officers stopping someone "based on an officer's observation of a bulge on a person without further description" or simply because a person looked back at an officer or changed the direction in which they were going. Notably, in 230 car stops, only two searches found weapons, while another two uncovered unidentified contraband.

The rates were worse in some areas: In the 43rd Precinct, which covers the Longwood and Hunts Point neighborhoods in the Bronx, 59 percent of their stops were unlawful and 68 percent of frisks were conducted without sufficient evidence that the person was armed.

Denerstein concludes that, though some units have better compliance than others, the department must take "corrective action immediately" and increase accountability. Her team plans to conduct a more extensive audit as a result.

During a press conference following the report's release, Adams held up the obituary of Claudia Quatey, a 16-year-old girl shot and killed by a stray bullet in Queens while sitting in her friend's car last month, saying that everyone should read it.

"These are the people, these are the children I'm talking about. So when the monitor writes her report, we should also talk about how many of the almost 10,000 illegal guns we removed off our streets," he said.

He continued, "So, good, great, be your statistician, but I got to stop Claudias from losing their lives and that's what I hear from the public."

7 Jun - New York Prison System Reverses Policy Restricting Incarcerated Writers

The policy would have made "prison a black box," incarcerated journalist John J. Lennon previously told New York Focus.

MORE:

by Jessica Schulberg (*HuffPost*)

New York's prison system reversed a policy on Wednesday that would have effectively blocked incarcerated writers and artists from publishing their work and receiving compensation.

"It is evident that [the policy] is not being interpreted as the Department intended, as it was never our objective to limit free speech or creative endeavors," the state's Department of Corrections and Community Supervision spokesperson Rachel Connors said in an email to *HuffPost*. "Accordingly, we have rescinded the directive effective immediately. The Department will engage [interested] stakeholders to revise the policy in order to encourage creative art projects, as originally intended."

The policy was first reported by *New York Focus* on Tuesday and attracted immediate backlash for its apparent effort to silence incarcerated writers and artists. The policy created a monthslong approval process for the people it imprisons to produce “creative work.”

DOCCS defined “creative work” as including but not limited to “artwork, dramatic composition, music composition, graphic arts/cartooning, film scripts, poetry, short stories, or book manuscripts.” Although the policy directive did not explicitly mention journalism, DOCCS confirmed to *New York Focus* that the rules applied to features, op-eds and other journalistic work.

“This is going to make prison a black box,” John J. Lennon, a journalist incarcerated in New York’s Sullivan Correctional Facility, told *New York Focus*.

The policy, which was not posted on the agency’s website until after *New York Focus* reached out for comment, gave prison officials broad authority to block work from being published for a range of reasons, including any mention of the creator’s crime or any portrayal of DOCCS that could “jeopardize safety or security.” It also prohibited people in prison from receiving payment for their published work. If they did receive compensation, it would have been directed to the state’s victim services agency.

Ahead of DOCCS’ reversal, Empowerment Avenue, a group that helps incarcerated writers and artists place their work in mainstream outlets and venues, began exploring whether the policy violated First Amendment protections, Emily Nonko and Rahsaan Thomas, the group’s co-founders, told *HuffPost*. Thomas, who was recently released from California’s San Quentin State Prison, was a 2020 Pulitzer Prize finalist for his work on the podcast “Ear Hustle.”

“Over the past few years, the level of reporting, storytelling and art inside prisons has been increasingly recognized for shedding light on conditions that the state hides from the public,” Nonko and Thomas said. “We realize the transformative power of the arts to tell the story of prison, spread awareness of the issues that incarcerated people face, bring people together across prison walls, and facilitate the kind of ‘rehabilitation’ that Department of Corrections claim to provide.”

Incarcerated journalists are uniquely positioned to expose misconduct inside prisons. Christopher Blackwell, who is imprisoned in the Washington Corrections Center, recently published a *New York Times* essay about the dangerous conditions he faced inside a county jail while awaiting a resentencing hearing. (I volunteer with Empowerment Avenue and have helped Blackwell place stories in *HuffPost* and elsewhere. We teamed up in 2021 on a story about how COVID isolation units in prison are often indistinguishable from punitive solitary confinement cells.)

Jobs in prison often pay pennies per hour, and the cost of communication, food and toiletries is considerably higher than in the free world. Although freelance journalism is typically not a lucrative profession, writing has enabled some incarcerated individuals to better afford to stay in touch with their loved ones and even save up for housing upon their release.

Blackwell is now mentoring other aspiring journalists inside his prison. “Can’t nobody tell our stories better than us,” Darrell Jackson, who is working with Blackwell to publish his first piece, told *HuffPost*. “Most of the things people hear about prison are bad things about the incarcerated individual versus the good things we do or the horrific things that go on inside of the prison.”

“I personally feel like if there’s nothing to hide, there should be no reason why individuals who are incarcerated should not be allowed the opportunity to express what’s going on.”

8 Jun - N.Y.C. Jails Chief Is Hiding Dysfunction at Rikers, Federal Monitor Says

Louis A. Molina, the jails commissioner, has failed to stop rampant violence, and officials have shut down avenues of information about what happens behind bars, according to a report filed in federal court.

MORE:

by Hurubie Meko (*New York Times*)

A year and a half into Louis A. Molina's tenure as New York City correction commissioner, the federal monitor overseeing the Rikers Island jail complex on Thursday took direct aim at his leadership, saying that the violence there remained unabated and that officials were hiding information about it.

"The commitment to effective collaboration, as evidenced by the department's recent performance, has deteriorated," the monitor, Steve J. Martin, wrote in a report filed in federal district court. "The department's approach to reform has recently become characterized by inaccuracies and a lack of transparency."

"These problems have grave consequences for the prospect of reform and eliminating the imminent risk of harm faced by incarcerated individuals and staff," he added.

In a statement issued in response to the monitor's report, a Correction Department spokesman, Frank Dwyer, said the number of in-custody deaths and slashings and stabbings had declined under Mr. Molina's leadership and accused Mr. Martin of appearing to "move the goal posts" by comparing those figures to prepandemic times.

"We remain focused on building upon the gains of the past 18 months and working every day in coordination with the monitor toward a safer and more humane environment for those who live and work on Rikers Island," Mr. Dwyer said.

Thursday's monitoring report was issued as Mr. Molina was facing intense pressure to turn around one of the worst crises to grip Rikers Island in decades. Appointed by Mayor Eric Adams in January 2022, Mr. Molina inherited chronic absenteeism that had peaked during the coronavirus pandemic and soaring rates of violence and neglect at the jail complex.

More recently, he has had to battle calls for a federal takeover of Rikers Island, avoiding that fate last year in part by promising in federal court to follow a plan to enact reforms.

As scrutiny of his department has intensified, Mr. Molina has taken steps that limit the public release of potentially damaging information, revoking a jail's oversight panel's unrestricted access to video footage from Rikers Island and reversing his predecessor's policy of notifying the public when deaths occur in custody.

In a report last month, the federal monitor detailed five "serious and disturbing" instances over a two-week period this spring in which detainees were injured or fell ill. The events, Mr. Martin wrote, were not appropriately reported by jail staff and were unknown to his team until reporters asked about them.

The clawing back of information from the public and failure to report deaths and serious injuries have drawn criticism, including from the City Council speaker, Adrienne Adams, who said in a statement last week that the council was considering "legislative solutions to address this administration's backtracking on transparency and undermining of oversight."

In a news conference after touring the Rikers Island facilities on Wednesday, Jumaane Williams, the city's public advocate, and Brad Lander, the comptroller, said that they would formally call for a federal takeover of the complex.

Thursday's monitoring report sounded an even more urgent alarm than the one issued in May, concluding that "the current state of affairs in the jails remains alarming, not just for the rampant violence and frequency with which force is used, but also because of regression in the department's management."

In an interview on Wednesday, Mr. Molina defended his leadership of the department during a difficult time and pushed back against those who have questioned his decisions to limit the public release of certain information.

“There’s not this hiding of information or anything like that,” Mr. Molina said, while acknowledging that he had taken some steps to avoid “an incorrect narrative of what was going on here to try to move the department forward.”

He added that he was fully cooperating with oversight efforts.

“I think we’re at a point where individuals want to curate their own fact pattern to reach the conclusion that they would like the public to have,” Mr. Molina said.

A monitor’s report issued shortly after Mr. Molina took over made clear the challenges he was facing. In March 2022, Mr. Martin wrote that violent incidents “have become normalized and have seemingly lost their power to instill a sense of urgency among those with the power to make change,” adding in bold text that the high rates of violence and use of force by correction officers “are not typical, they are not expected, they are not normal.”

Mr. Molina insisted in the interview on Wednesday that he could enact the reforms needed to make Rikers Island safer and more functional. He said his past experience helping to steer the Westchester County Jail in New York out of federal oversight in 2020 made him uniquely suited to turn Rikers Island around.

“I think we have a long way to go, but I think we’ve made great strides,” he said. “Because the numbers don’t lie, they are what they are — they may not tell the whole story, but they’re, I think, a good barometer.”

Among the positive indicators, Mr. Molina said, were a recent decline in chronic absenteeism among jail guards and progress in processing a backlog of correction officer disciplinary cases.

“Over the last almost 18 months now, I have signed off on the adjudication of over 3,000 disciplinary cases,” he said, although the monitor has noted that many cases were closed without being investigated.

Still, citing the findings of the monitor’s recent reports, advocates for people detained at Rikers Island were renewing their calls for a federal judge to strip Mr. Molina of control over the Correction Department and appoint a receiver to oversee the jails.

They said that Mr. Molina had obstructed the jail’s oversight bodies’ ability to know what’s happening on the inside, inflaming tensions and causing concern that problems were being hidden.

“This administration has not only wrought horrific levels of violence in the jails, but is increasingly authoritarian in seeking to shield its abuses from judicial and public oversight,” Mary Lynne Werlwas, director of the Prisoners’ Rights Project at the Legal Aid Society, said in a statement on Thursday, adding that reforming the jails should be “placed in the hands of a trustworthy, independent entity that can do what the Department of Correction is unwilling or unable to do.”

The jails fell under federal oversight in 2015 after a class-action lawsuit against the Correction Department regarding the frequent use of excessive force. The lawsuit resulted in a consent judgment, and Mr. Martin was appointed to issue periodic reports on violence within the facilities.

Mr. Molina has not faced criticism just over the sharing of information on deaths and injuries. His decision to cut services for detainees also drew questions. In May, he announced that in response to a City Hall order requiring agencies to slash their budgets, he would eliminate contracts with five nonprofit

organizations that provide incarcerated people with group therapy and job training sessions, among other things.

The programs might have helped reduce violence in the jails, said JoAnne Page, president of one of the service providers, the Fortune Society.

“It’s a jail-management truism that you don’t want people idle, because that creates a ramp up in violence,” Ms. Page said.

Following the monitor’s report in May, the judge presiding over the federal case ordered the Corrections Department and other parties to the suit to appear in Federal District Court in Manhattan next week.

In her order, the judge, Laura T. Swain, wrote that the incidents described in the monitor’s report “have highlighted dangerous conditions and unsafe practices, as well as grave concerns related to transparency and the reporting of information to the monitoring team.”

The hearing was set to take place on Tuesday.

18 Jun - MACC Care Assembly

WHAT: Assembly

WHEN: 3:00pm, Sunday, June 18th

WHERE: PIT Records & Books, 411 South 5th Street, Brooklyn

COST: FREE

MORE:

SCHEDULE:

- Fight (3pm) Martial arts training - no experience necessary!
- Enlight (4pm) Housing/Squatting
- Bite & Invite (5pm) Care exchange while we share a community meal

What is the care exchange? As we sit down to share a meal we check in and exchange our requests and offers, in the spirit of mutual aid. Requests – do you need help with anything? Offers – do you have any skills, time, or resources to offer? This is a conversation to help facilitate building and maintaining relationships among us by identifying needs and sharing what we can in solidarity.

For COVID safety: masks required; please test within 48 hours ahead of the meeting if possible; free tests will be provided at the door.