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MAYOR DE BLASIO AND CHIEF JUDGE LIPPMAN ANNOUNCE JUSTICE REBOOT, AN INITIATIVE TO MODERNIZE THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Immediate reforms aim to reduce criminal case delays, significantly cut the Rikers Island jail population and make the summons process fairer and more efficient

NEW YORK – Mayor Bill de Blasio and the Chief Judge of the State of New York Jonathan Lippman today announced immediate changes that will modernize the criminal justice system and improve the quality of justice in New York City. This plan is the first stage of the administration’s new initiative, Justice Reboot, which solidifies a long-term commitment to reduce unnecessary incarceration safely and promote confidence in the fairness of the justice system.

Three immediate steps will **improve the criminal justice system dramatically:**

1. Within 45 days, calendar for trial or plea all cases where the defendant is being held at Rikers and the case has been pending for longer than a year.
2. Within six months, resolve 50 percent of all cases where the defendant is detained at Rikers and the case has been pending for longer than a year.
3. Overhaul half of all criminal court cases by making the summons process easier to understand and navigate.

Over the last 20 years, New York City has cut its jail population by half, in part through a focus on reform efforts throughout the justice system. New York City was able to reduce incarceration while also achieving extraordinary success in driving down crime, with murders plummeting from 2,245 in 1990 to an all-time low of 333 last year. Justice Reboot will reduce unnecessary incarceration even further while promoting fairness by streamlining coordination among criminal justice actors, and using technology to identify, track, and solve problems in the City’s criminal justice system.

“Justice Reboot is about rethinking the way we approach criminal justice in NYC,” said **Mayor de Blasio**. “Today’s changes are part of my long-term commitment to bring the criminal justice system into the 21st century, safely drive down the number of people behind bars, and make the system fairer. I want to thank Chief Judge Lippman, the courts, the district attorneys and the defense bar for being forward-thinking partners in this effort.”

“Improving the quality of justice and fostering public trust and confidence in our justice system are critical objectives that the courts, law enforcement and the defense bar all share,” said **Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman**. “The program we announce today is a collaborative, broad-based initiative to promote these goals. By bringing together all the key participants to tackle case backlogs, identify systemic problems and develop and implement effective solutions, Justice Reboot is a novel undertaking that will lead to a fairer, more efficient criminal justice system in this city. I commend Mayor de Blasio and the courts’ New York City criminal justice system partners for their leadership, cooperation and support in helping implement these much-needed reforms.”

Moving cases through the criminal justice system more quickly will reduce the average daily population in Rikers Island jails. Defendants who are detained in City jails for extensive periods while waiting for trial are the single biggest contributor to the size of the jail population. Just 5 percent of all defendants dismissed from Rikers Island in 2014 filled 44 percent of the jail's beds—because these inmates each spent over 270 days on Rikers waiting for their trial. The vast majority of defendants spent much shorter periods in city jails. Immediate reforms will focus on clearing the oldest cases first while ongoing work on systemic issues will ensure enduring progress.

Steps to reduce case processing times include:

- **Resolution of 50 percent of the cases pending for longer than a year within the next six months.** Under a program spearheaded by Chief Judge Lippman in 2013, judges, prosecutors, and the defense bar in the Bronx successfully cut the backlog of pending felony cases by more than half by adding extra judges from other counties and processing cases that had been pending for longer than two years before a special judge with a mandate to clear them. Yet average case lengths throughout the city have increased over the last 20 years. Building upon lessons learned in the Bronx, today's announcement includes an unprecedented, citywide commitment from the courts, the Mayoral agencies, the District Attorneys, and the defense bar – all of whom have a role to play in reducing case processing times – to schedule a court date within the next 45 days for all cases citywide that have been pending for longer than one year. At Chief Judge Lippman's direction, cases that cannot be disposed by plea will be assigned a fixed trial date.
- **Deep, analytic dives into borough-specific problems and solutions.** To ensure swift implementation and accountability, each borough will have a dedicated team of representatives from the courts, the Mayor's office, the District Attorneys' offices, law enforcement, and the defense bar. These teams, led by each county's Administrative Judge, will map the specific causes of case delay in each borough, monitor the progress of the oldest cases, develop systemic reforms to institutionalize shorter case processing times, and implement these reforms. These teams will be assisted by a team of research and operations experts and some of the teams have already begun meeting.
- **A centralized coordinating body.** Starting with an initial meeting in mid-April 2015, leadership from the Mayor's Office, the Office of Court Administration, the District Attorneys' offices, and the defense bar will meet regularly to review progress toward goals and make implementation decisions based on the borough teams' recommendations.
- **A sophisticated technological tool to track case trends in real time.** To provide transparency and real-time information on case processing times citywide, the City will launch an online tracking tool. This tool will allow each part of the criminal justice system to assess specific causes of delays in individual cases, track borough-specific case processing timelines alongside volume and resource availability, prepare status reports to pinpoint bottlenecks, and help the Coordinating Committee develop solutions and ensure progress implementing them.
- **A 21st century scheduling system.** To minimize adjournments, which contribute to case delay, the case tracking tool will also include a centralized scheduling function that integrates the individual schedules of judges, prosecutors, corrections, the police, and defense attorneys to allow courts to quickly and reliably set future court appearance dates.

Making the summons process easier to understand and navigate will change how nearly half of the criminal court cases in NYC are processed. While the number of summonses issued in 2014 was down 35 percent from a high of 544,678 in 2009, the total number of summonses issued citywide (359,432) last year was roughly equal to the number of arrests (355,397). Although half of all criminal court cases involve summonses, only 27

percent of the summonses issued last year resulted in a conviction. Another 38 percent of summons issued resulted in a warrant for failure to appear in court, which may affect the likelihood of future detention. Immediate reforms will clarify the time, date, and location of court appearances and provide a wider window within which to satisfy the summons. This will make the summons process more transparent and improve the overall quality of justice.

Steps to ensure that people who receive a summons appear in court include:

- **A redesigned summons form that makes the date of appearance easier to understand.** The City and courts worked with non-profit behavioral design lab ideas42, with funding from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, to redesign the summons form making information easier to understand in order to better prompt people to return to court. Additionally, the new form will collect individuals' phone numbers and include a phone number and website where recipients can access their cases, view when their court appearance is scheduled, and determine whether they have outstanding warrants. The website will also have translated copies of the summons form. The new form will be operational this summer. A comparison of the old form and the new form, and additional information about the science driving these changes, is available [here](#).
- **A reminder system to ensure defendants appear in court.** The courts will test a number of different reminders citywide in Summer of 2015, using both robocalls and text messages. The most effective method will be scaled up citywide.
- **Flexible appearance date and night court.** Beginning with a pilot in Manhattan North in the summer of 2015, individuals who have received summonses will be permitted to appear any time a week in advance of their court appearance. The court will also be open until 8:00 p.m. on Tuesdays. If these pilots increase court appearances, the programs will be scaled up citywide.

Steps to enhance transparency and improve the quality of justice in summons court include:

- **Publicly available quarterly data.** Beginning today and repeated each quarter, the City will post data raw data on summons enforcement, broken down by precinct and race. To ensure transparency and accountability, individuals will be able to download and analyze the data themselves to track trends. Going forward, the police department's annual report will also include summons activity with details on demographics.
- **Real-time, electronic access to case files.** Beginning in April 2015, the Court will provide defense attorneys with tablets that provide them with all of the factual allegations docketed for that day to better advise their clients.
- **Online payment of fines.** Beginning this summer, the courts will implement a new process permitting people convicted of summons offenses to pay fines online.
- **Training on collateral consequences for 18-b attorneys and Judicial Hearing Officers.** Public defenders, since late March 2015, and Judicial Hearing Officers, beginning in April 2015, will be trained in how to better advise clients about the collateral consequences associated with summonses.

For more information on Justice Reboot, including additional data and detail on these reforms, please visit www.nyc.gov/justicereboot.

“This is an unusual moment in which every part of a complicated system – courts, district attorneys, defenders, Mayoral agencies – have come together,” said **Elizabeth Glazer, director of the Mayor’s Office of Criminal**

Justice. “The leadership shown by every partner and the deep commitment of each to forwarding the cause of justice is what will ensure that this effort to promote confidence in the criminal justice system is realized.”

“We support the efforts to increase transparency by posting summons data and we applaud testing methods to ensure a higher court appearance rate. Police resources are too often wasted returning defendants to court on warrants that could have been avoided,” said **NYPD Commissioner William Bratton.**

Attorney General Eric Schneiderman said, “The initiatives proposed by Mayor de Blasio and Chief Judge Lippman are a great step toward a more efficient, sensible approach to how we deal with summonses and process our cases in New York City. As a strong supporter of evidence-based solutions to our criminal justice problems, I applaud the reforms presented today.”

“These reforms will go a long way towards streamlining and improving our criminal justice system which for too long has been needlessly complex and difficult to navigate,” said **City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito.** “There is more work to be done on criminal justice reform as we seek to make our city a more fair and just place and today’s announcement is a strong step in that direction.”

DOC Commissioner Joseph Ponte said, “I welcome the opportunity to work with our criminal justice partners to clear the backlog of cases in the city’s justice system. The DOC jails were never intended for long stays. We have inmates who have been at Rikers two years or more and that is unacceptable. By moving long-term detainees out of our jails, we can reduce the burden on our staff, increase staff and inmate safety and more efficiently serve the inmates who remain in our custody.”

DOP Commissioner Ana Bermúdez said, “By ensuring speedier resolution of cases and swifter returns to the community, Justice Reboot will allow the Department of Probation to start doing its transformative work sooner and will result in more effective accountability for probation clients. I applaud Mayor de Blasio and my colleagues for taking this bold step.”

“This considerable set of reforms will undoubtedly increase fairness within the justice system, and is a worthy endeavor. The people of this city deserve a justice system that works for everyone, and the Justice Reboot plan aims to make sure that is the case. I thank Mayor de Blasio for his commitment to these reforms, and look forward to working with the administration on their implementation,” said **Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.**

“Today’s reforms by Mayor de Blasio and Chief Judge Lippmann mark a giant step forward in bringing New York’s criminal justice system into the 21st century,” said **Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer.** “By applying clear benchmarks and technology to the judicial process, the system’s backlogs can be reduced. By making the summons system easier to understand and expanding access to the court to respond to a summons, unnecessary incarceration can be avoided.”

Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance Jr. said, “For the past five years, my office has focused on improving the criminal justice system by speeding up the amount of time it takes for a defendant to be arraigned before a judge, reducing the amount of times victims, witnesses, and defendants are required to come back for trials, increasing the number of trials, and reducing the number of dismissals. We have done this in partnership with the courts and the defense bar, despite budget shortfalls that led to fewer judges, court officers, and clerks in the courtrooms. The City’s new project seeks to build on these improvements. Collaboration, cooperation, and enhanced resources will make these reforms possible, and I look forward working with our partners to implement them.”

“Mayor de Blasio and Chief Judge Lippman’s Reboot initiative is a strong step towards a more fair and just criminal system. We have a responsibility to ensure that our correctional system is modernized and efficient. I am confident that this plan will not only help inmates to turn their lives around more quickly, but also make our City a more safe place to live,” said **Congressman Charles Rangel.**

“The mass incarceration of millions of Americans, disproportionately young men who are African American or Latino, harms our civil society by depriving communities of their young men, separating husbands from their wives and fathers from their children, and stigmatizing young men as felons. Many of those individuals who are incarcerated have committed only minor infractions, such as failing to pay a small fine, but are nonetheless confined a jail for an extended period of time. I commend Mayor Bill de Blasio and Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman for the efforts to reduce the rate of incarceration in New York City by expediting the processing of pending cases and providing the public with better information about appearances in court and paying fines. These initiatives have the potential to increase compliance and, therefore, reduce the number of people who are unnecessarily jailed for minor infractions,” said **Congresswoman Yvette D. Clarke**.

“Our criminal justice system is severely stressed. There are simple steps that we can take to streamline the process while maintaining a strong commitment to keeping New Yorkers safe,” said **Congressman Eliot Engel**. “Mayor de Blasio and Chief Judge Lippman’s new Justice Reboot initiative makes some smart changes. It will remove strain on jails, police, prosecutors, and courts, allow cases to move quickly and efficiently, and make the system easier to understand and navigate, all while continuing to maintain a high level of safety for all New Yorkers.”

“While we have made significant progress during the last two decades in reforming our City’s justice system, there is still more to do. NYC Justice Reboot will modernize and improve New York City’s criminal justice system by streamlining and speeding the judicial process to reduce the number of incarcerations while keeping our streets safe. I applaud Mayor de Blasio for taking one more step to update New York City’s criminal justice system and bring it into the 21st Century,” said **Congressman Jose E. Serrano**.

“Today is a big step for our push to have more transparency and basic fairness in our criminal justice system,” said **State Senator Daniel Squadron**. “I have pushed for more fairness in our state’s marijuana laws, and the end of a system where people languish in Rikers without ever being convicted. Mayor de Blasio and Chief Judge Lippman are stepping in where the state legislature has failed, with these important initiatives in both areas to promote justice. ”

“Changes implemented through Justice Reboot are long overdue. Now is the time to get low level offenders processed in a timely manner, while at the same time punishing the more serious offenders by having their trials come up sooner. Some low level offenders have been lost in the system and languished in jail for over two years for minor offenses that wouldn’t normally even merit a jail sentence. This initiative will work at alleviating this problem. Summons reform is another system that has needed an overhaul for some time. Offenders who receive summons are often presented with a hard to read document filled with legalese rather than plain language. Creating a fair criminal justice system has long been my top priority as the Chair of the Assembly’s Standing Committee on Codes, and I look forward to working with Mayor de Blasio and Chief Judge Lippman on Justice Reboot,” said **Assembly Member Joseph Lentol**.

“Summons court is the city’s ‘broken windows’ court, and it’s been broken for too long; that’s why I called a hearing on this issue in December 2014,” said **Council Member Rory I. Lancman, Chair of the Committee on Courts and Legal Services**. “These are real, comprehensive reforms that will make summons court more efficient, more user friendly and more fair for all involved, including the taxpaying public.”

“The announced plans to coordinate stakeholders involved in the criminal justice system and improve technology associated with the summons process are improvements that are necessary to maintaining critical aspects of this City’s public safety,” said **Council Member Vanessa L. Gibson, Chair of the Committee on Public Safety**. “I am confident that through increased coordination by key stakeholders, timely prioritization of court dates, and better oversight of resources that will allow for quick redeployment as problems arise, we will see an increase in the speed of case processing and be able to better meet borough-specific needs. I am particularly excited to see technology introduced to the summons process. From robo-calling and texting those scheduled to appear to requiring quarterly reports of summons activity that would include race and ethnicity, I believe technology will bring transparency to this process previously unseen. I want to thank the Mayor’s

Office of Criminal Justice’s Director Elizabeth Glazer and her staff for their steadfast commitment to public safety of all New Yorkers.”

“For years, the New York City court calendars have been unnecessarily backlogged with cases. It is about time that something was done about this and I am pleased that Mayor de Blasio is taking a stance to move justice forward and relieve our judicial system from a tremendous bottleneck of cases. In addition to expediting cases and clearing court calendars, I’m looking forward to fairness and justice being served. Thank you Mayor de Blasio for these steps to improve our judicial system,” said **Council Member Andy King, Co-Chair of the City Council Black, Latino & Asian Caucus.**

“Understanding which of our neighbors are impacted by the criminal justice system is a crucial step toward reform and creating a New York where people feel they are treated fairly and can trust the police. That's why returning racial information to summons forms has been a top priority,” said **New York Civil Liberties Union Executive Director Donna Lieberman.** “Only with tracking and regular public reporting on who is getting tickets and for what can New Yorkers start to understand the consequences of policing practices on our communities and demand real change.”

“When over 1 million New Yorkers have outstanding warrants for low-level violations, something is amiss. A summons should be used to avoid unnecessary arrests, not to perpetuate them. We applaud Mayor de Blasio for making much needed changes to ensure flexibility and transparency for New York City’s summons system. These changes will most benefit low-income people of color, many of whom are unable to adjust their work schedules and family responsibilities to make a court appearance. Also, by collecting and reporting demographic data on summonses we can better monitor activity so that communities of color are not bearing an outsized burden of enforcement. We look forward to a continued partnership with the Mayor’s office to eliminate the ‘Tale of Two Cities’ that exists for people of color in the criminal justice system,” said **Alyssa Aguilera, Political Director of VOCAL-NY.**

"We are proud to partner with New York City to improve the criminal justice system, and apply our expertise in behavioral science to support Justice Reboot. Simple things, like ensuring that court date and time are clear and easy to understand, or sending reminders to appear, can have an outsized influence on behavior and outcomes. These improvements will help people better understand when, where, and why they need to show up to court, and so hopefully reduce the large number of warrants issued each year simply for a failure to appear,” said **Alissa Fishbane, Managing Director at ideas42.**

“For New Yorkers who are low income or people of color, the criminal justice system has long operated as an inescapable maze. Once someone enters, even for a simple summons like simple marijuana possession, it can be nearly impossible to find your way out again. Communities across the City have long demanded change. So we welcome the changes announced today by the de Blasio Administration, which will move New York City in the right direction with greater transparency, increased accountability, and a focus on systemic reform,” said **Kassandra Frederique, Policy Manager, Drug Policy Alliance.**

Seymour W. James, Attorney-in-Chief of The Legal Aid Society, said, “We are pleased that the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice and the courts are embarking on this initiative to reduce the Rikers Island jail population by expediting the processing of cases where there has been lengthy detention. Our clients, who are poor and unable to make bail and many of whom are wrongly accused, become victims of a system that subjects them to the horrors of incarceration while they await resolution of their cases. We look forward to working with the City and the courts to reduce the delays in case processing that have caused the lengthy stays at Rikers for our clients awaiting trial. We are also pleased that the City will provide quarterly reports reflecting the summons activity by precinct that include demographics, so that the public may be informed about policing activities in the various neighborhoods of the City.”

“‘Justice delayed is Justice denied.’ Our criminal justice system is broken and needs to be fixed. It can be fixed. This is a solid measure towards that end,” said **Al-Hajj Talib 'Abdur-Rashid, Imam, The Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood.**

“Thousands of immigrants a year plead guilty in summons court without realizing the potentially dire immigration consequences of their pleas. We applaud the City’s efforts to more closely examine summons court practices and look forward to working with the City to promote due process for all New Yorkers,” said **Alisa Wellek, Co-Executive Director of the Immigrant Defense Project.**

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