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**FIRST LADY CHIRLANE MCCRAY, DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION AND
CHILDREN'S MUSEUM OF MANHATTAN LAUNCH PILOT PROGRAM TO UNITE
FAMILIES OF INCARCERATED WOMEN**

*First-of-its kind program will allow women at Rikers Island to bond with their children
through activities and shared experiences at the Children's Museum*

NEW YORK—First Lady of New York City Chirlane McCray today announced a groundbreaking pilot program designed to allow mothers currently incarcerated at Rikers Island to visit and participate in activities with their children at the Children's Museum of Manhattan. The program, which launched its first family visit on April 30, brings select mothers, children, and their custodial caregivers to the museum when it is closed to the public. Parents and children will participate in arts activities designed to support bonding and ease the trauma of separation. The custodial caregivers that participate in the pilot program will receive a CMOM membership, which will be renewed free of charge when the incarcerated mothers return home.

“To be emotionally healthy, children must bond with a parent and spend quality time with that parent. It is a necessity for their mental health and overall well-being,” **said First Lady Chirlane McCray**, who [recently announced](#) a series of new initiatives to support incarcerated women on Rikers Island and their families. “Time spent together outside of a jail environment, making art, dancing, and enjoying music will provide children with opportunities to express themselves and relieve the anxieties that so many families of incarcerated women experience. The Children's Museum of Manhattan, with its commitment to the arts and child development, is the perfect partner and setting for this new and groundbreaking program.”

“This extraordinary reunification opportunity allows mothers to interact with the children in secure environments, outside of the jails,” **said Department of Correction Commissioner Cynthia Brann**. “Time spent with families can have a positive influence both during and after an individual's time in jail. The more humane we can make the experience of incarceration, the safer our jails will be for both detainees and personnel. Our city is better off too, because this initiative also offers a vital step to help women in DOC custody successfully return to society.”

“Children's museums have a special role to play in the lives of all children. We are honored to be able to offer these families, and all New York City's families, opportunities for discovery and joy. Through arts programs, parents and children can actively explore together, express and

share their feelings, or simply relax together in a safe, nurturing space,” said **Andrew S. Ackerman, Executive Director, Children’s Museum of Manhattan.**

This new pilot program for incarcerated women and their children is based on tested programs at the Museum, which use art-making to positively influence behavior in its Health and Learning Hub program. Hubs bring permanent museum-quality installations, wall graphics, and hands-on, arts-based education programs focused on developing healthy lifestyles and literacy to Head Start centers and NYC Department of Homeless Services shelters across the five boroughs. The City is committed to continuing this program, including recurring visits and community connections, to improve family relationships and reentry for incarcerated women.

The Children’s Museum is widely recognized for its commitment to both child development and arts-based learning. Past art-related exhibitions include “The Art of Andy Warhol” and “Sunday Morning Breakfast: the Art of Romare Bearden.” “Art Inside Out” invited visitors to step into works by artists Elizabeth Murray, William Wegman, and Fred Wilson. Dance and music were the foci of “Jazzed! The Changing Beat of 125th Street” and the current “Let’s Dance!” exhibit. “Art, Artists & You,” which gives visitors an active role in the artistic process, opens at the Museum on Saturday, June 2.

In February, First Lady McCray [announced](#) a \$6 million investment to launch new initiatives designed to break the cycle of incarceration for women in New York City. Among those initiatives, the City will expand programming to support family connections and resilience, enhance critical behavioral health services and create a network of re-entry services that help women and their families stabilize and prevent future returns to jail.

First Lady Chirlane McCray was also the driving force behind the 2016 launch of citywide baby showers to ensure that new and expectant parents had access to City resources and services—which included a shower at Rikers Island for women incarcerated on Rikers Island and their young children in 2016 and 2017.

Over the last four years, New York City has made significant, system-changing investments to ensure that fewer people enter jails and that those who do have access to the therapeutic, educational and vocational services that can lay the foundation for future stability and prevent returns to jail. While women have been served by these system changes, new programs like this partnership with the Children’s Museum of Manhattan marks the extension of dedicated services that specifically address the unique needs of incarcerated women.

Women comprise seven percent of the overall jail population in New York City and are more likely than incarcerated men to have histories of trauma, mental illness and substance misuse, and significant housing and employment needs. Further, the majority of women at the Rose M. Singer Center (RMSC) on Rikers Island have a child in their home or are the primary caretaker of another family member.

By addressing these unique issues faced by women in New York City jails, the programming announced today will help rectify some of the issues that lead women to enter the criminal justice system, accelerate safe reductions to the number of women in City jails and better protect children from negative outcomes associated with parental incarceration, which include higher rates of school drop-out, homelessness, learning disabilities, and chronic health conditions.

These efforts build on the de Blasio [administration's plan](#) announced in 2017 to close Rikers Island and create a borough-based jail system that is smaller, safer and fairer.

“This initiative is an example of how the arts can be a powerful tool for advancing civic and social good, such as helping to heal families with an incarcerated parent,” said **Cultural Affairs Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl**. “Giving parents and kids the chance to express themselves and explore their creativity together in a stimulating, supportive, and safe environment such as the Children’s Museum of Manhattan provides a positive experience for them both as individuals and as family units.”

“The trauma of incarceration can have lasting health impacts for the person in prison and their loved ones outside of it, particularly children,” said **Health Commissioner Dr. Mary T. Bassett**. “This initiative is a way to strengthen familial supports, which are important for the mental and physical health of mother and child.”

“Maintaining ties between incarcerated individuals and their loved ones is so important, especially when we are talking about a mother and her child. Everyone benefits when children can have personal, consistent contact with parents who are incarcerated. I commend the Mayor and First Lady for this innovative program and look forward to seeing the results,” said **State Senator Velmanette Montgomery**.

“The children of incarcerated individuals are unfortunately and far too often the forgotten victims in our criminal justice system. Despite committing no crime, nor having any charges brought against them, they are still forced to cope with the damaging effects of being separated from a parent while that parent is in a jail or prison, especially if that parent is their mother” said **Assembly Member David I. Weprin, Assembly Correction Committee Chair**. “Any step we take to strengthen familial and community bonds for the families of incarcerated individuals and any advance made towards enhancing parental bonds between mothers and their children must be applauded. I commend First Lady of New York City Chirlane McCray for launching this important pilot program between the New York City Department of Correction and Children’s Museum of Manhattan.”

Assembly Member Latrice M. Walker said “The Uniting Families of Incarcerated Women program is the beginning of the collective fight towards reducing African-American women and girls’ growing rates of mass incarceration. Reuniting families and offering a mother an opportunity to bond with her family is the crutch that is needed on an already difficult journey. I commend First Lady Chirlane McCray for launching this program because it offers the support to incarcerated mother’s children and families as they grow up without their mother’s physical presence.”

“By allowing children to connect with their incarcerated mothers in an appropriate environment, the City is taking steps to improve the re-entry process. As we focus on the closure of Rikers Island, these initiatives are critical to supporting mothers and families impacted by the criminal justice system. I applaud First Lady McCray and the Department of Correction for committing resources for incarcerated women, and the Children's Museum of Manhattan for offering such a unique program,” said **Council Member Keith Powers, chair of the Criminal Justice Committee**.

“Museums have always been spaces that bring families together to learn and experience joy and wonder,” said **Council Member Van Bramer, Chair of the City Council’s Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries**. “I’m happy to see this opportunity extended to incarcerated mothers and their families. This program at the Children’s Museum of Manhattan will allow mothers and children to create together, spend quality time together and strengthen their connections to one another. All of which will contribute the health and wellbeing of the whole family, ultimately reducing incidents of incarceration. Experiencing arts and culture truly changes lives and I am proud to fight for programs like this that expand access to the arts for all New Yorkers.”

“I applaud the efforts of First Lady McCray and the Department of Corrections to break the cycle of incarceration for women in New York City, and I stand firmly with them in believing that all mothers and children have a right to spend meaningful, restorative time together. The Children’s Museum of Manhattan has long offered families, my own included, a nurturing, communal space to get creative, explore the world around us, and become lifelong learners. This forward-thinking institution is a cornerstone of my district, the Upper West Side, and they are the perfect partner for bringing this noble program to life,” said **Council Member Helen Rosenthal, Chair of the Committee on Women**.

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