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**FIRST LADY CHIRLANE MCCRAY ANNOUNCES \$6 MILLION INVESTMENT TO  
BREAK CYCLE OF INCARCERATION FOR WOMEN IN NYC**

**NEW YORK**—Today First Lady Chirlane McCray announced a set of new initiatives designed to break the cycle of incarceration for women in New York City. 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.

“Women in prison have unique needs and challenges while they are incarcerated. The majority of women on Rikers Island are parents and often also primary caretakers of a loved one, which means a woman’s imprisonment has a profound effect on their families and communities. Women need services that are gender responsive while they are incarcerated and as they navigate their reconnection to their children and families, including employment skill development and secure stable housing,” said **First Lady Chirlane McCray**, who spearheads the City’s mental health and substance misuse efforts. “With this new investment, we will ensure that women in prison get the behavioral health services they need to maintain healthier relationships with their children and provide families with better wraparound supports. Today, we’re taking bigger steps toward breaking the cycle of incarceration for women in New York City and changing the culture of our prison system for the better.”

“One of the greatest joys of my life was watching my kids grow up. Jail should not stop a mother from spending time with her child, or drive a wedge between families,” said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. “The First Lady’s efforts will make our jails more humane, and give women in prison the tools they need to break the cycle of incarceration.”

In 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, this \$6 million investment in new programming marks the extension of dedicated services that specifically address the unique needs of incarcerated women.

“Having increased visitation and advocate services for my children would have increased my chances with bonding and securing confidence in my children that they would return to me one day. Every child deserves their mother’s love and attention no matter where they are. Having services provided to me while incarcerated decreased my stress, anxiety and depression. Having someone to talk to allowed me to sleep better at nights,” said **Shaquana Malloy**, a mother who was formerly incarcerated on Rikers Island.

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.

### **Support family connections and resilience**

As a part of the existing work happening across City jails to improve the quality of visiting, New York City will expedite improvements to this process for women in jail as well as implement several new programs that address the unique needs of families with an incarcerated parent, including:

- Improving the frequency and durations of family visiting days;
- Expanding the successful Children of Incarcerated Parents Program (CHIPP) to offer weekly visitation for both those involved in the child welfare system and additional children with an incarcerated parent;
- Implementing evidence-driven programming during visits and after the parent returns to the community to help families stabilize; and
- Creating a dedicated position at the Department of Correction to oversee and coordinate high-quality programming and visiting in the women’s jail.

### **Address significant behavioral health needs of women in jails**

Building off the strong foundation created by ThriveNYC and the Behavioral Health and Criminal Justice Task Force, NYC Health + Hospitals/Correctional Health Services will expand its work to improve access to high-quality therapeutic services for incarcerated individuals by implementing several evidence-driven strategies that address the unique needs of women in jails, including:

- Connecting dedicated counselors to women at risk of intimate partner violence for safety planning and therapy;
- Creating counselling programs that focus on promoting healthy coping for stress and trauma to address anxiety, depression, chronic pain, and insomnia; and
- Using an intensive treatment model to better manage co-occurring serious medical and mental illness in the women’s infirmary.

## **Support the long-term stability that prevents future returns to jail**

The new investments announced today will also build off of the re-entry network the City has recently launched to provide stabilizing support for everyone leaving City jails to specifically address the unique needs of incarcerated women and their families, including:

- Career mentoring and transitional employment support;
- Domestic violence risk assessments and emergency support for women leaving jail;
- An evidence-driven program of in-home therapy for families dealing with stress of incarceration and reentry;
- Training for Family Court partners to assist families in court proceedings and help keep families intact; and
- Coordinating City agencies to create a “Family Services Help Desk” to connect family members to wrap-around services through the Children’s Cabinet.

In 2015, First Lady McCray launched ThriveNYC, the most comprehensive behavioral health plan of any city or county in the nation. Comprised of 54 initiatives, ThriveNYC aims to reform NYC’s behavioral health system by using a public health approach that addresses risk across the lifespan and acknowledges the impact of social determinants on individual wellbeing. Families who have been touched by the criminal justice system are often a higher risk for poor mental health. ThriveNYC has helped these families break the intergenerational cycle of trauma by providing responsive care that directly addresses the needs of isolated, marginalized families.

Further, First Lady Chirlane McCray launched the citywide baby shower series in 2016 to ensure that new and expectant parents had access to City resources and services—which included a shower at RMSC for women incarcerated on Rikers Island and their young children in 2016 and 2017.

The new investments announced today will also help NYC build on its historic reduction in women’s jail incarceration, which has decreased by 23 percent during the de Blasio Administration—compared to 21 percent for the overall jail population. In March 2017, Mayor de Blasio announced the [administration’s plan](#) to close Rikers Island and create a borough-based jail system that is smaller, safer and fairer. New York City has the lowest incarceration rate of any large U.S. city with an incarceration rate of 167 per 100,000 versus 229 in LA, 252 in Chicago, 338 in Houston and 784 in Philadelphia in 2016.

“There’s no more effective or humane way to disrupt cycles of incarceration than by reinforcing family bonds,” said **DOC Commissioner Cynthia Brann**. “These programs, which strengthen a visitation and support initiative that we already know works, would do exactly that.”

“Women’s pathways into the criminal justice system are generally linked to trauma, substance use and mental health, poverty and unhealthy partner relationships,” said **Health Commissioner Dr. Mary T. Bassett**. “This infusion of support and care can help break this cycle of incarceration and have a lasting effect not only on women, but also on their families and communities.”

“The needs of incarcerated women are great, and some of their challenges have been shown to be related to poverty, domestic violence and unaddressed mental health needs,” said **Cecile Noel, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence**. “These enhanced programming supports have the potential to increase positive outcomes for criminal justice involved women, ease their return home to their families, and break the unfortunate cycle that keeps so many women involved in the criminal justice system.”

**David A. Hansell, Commissioner for the Administration for Children's Services** said, “We know from experience and data that the well-being of children in foster care improves when they have consistent and frequent visits with their parents who are incarcerated. This bold, comprehensive initiative includes an expansion of our program supporting children visiting their mothers at Riker's Island, and will add additional visiting time for mothers and their children on weekends. We commend and thank First Lady Chirlane McCray for her vision and leadership in developing this initiative, which will be a national model for supporting families.”

“Women incarcerated in NYC jails have high rates of medical and mental illness and face unique challenges both in jail and as they reintegrate back into the community,” said **Dr. Mitchell Katz, President and CEO of NYC Health + Hospitals**. “We are proud to be able to offer services which will enhance mental health care to women in the infirmary; increase women's self-sufficiency and skills for coping with psychological stress; and provide counseling and coordinate safety planning for women who have been victims of intimate partner violence. These tools will help support NYC Health + Hospitals' ongoing efforts to improve health care delivery in a correctional setting and better prepare our patients to leave jail and not return. We look forward to continuing our work with everyone involved in the criminal justice system to address the needs of all of our patients.”

**Elizabeth Glazer, Director of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice** said, “The First Lady's announcement is an important step for justice. Providing mental health services for women in custody and promoting links between children and families will create better conditions both inside and outside of our correctional facilities and lay the groundwork for people to reintegrate into the community.”

**Benita R. Miller, Executive Director of NYC Children's Cabinet**, said, “The Children's Cabinet is excited to continue its support of First Lady Chirlane McCray's efforts to support the children and families that are impacted by parental incarceration. The investments being made will improve services for women at Riker's Island while promoting child well-being and family stability. It's a natural outgrowth of her commitment to ensuring that incarceration does not contribute to poor child well-being outcomes.”

**Comptroller Scott M. Stringer** said, “For decades, we took the wrong approach to criminal justice. As society built more and more prisons, it delivered policies that put more and more people in them. We need to end the cycle of incarceration, lower recidivism, and give people the tools that prevent them from going to jail in the first place. With this investment, the City is taking a modern, 21st century approach. It is no doubt a step in the right direction.”

**Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams** said, “Our criminal justice system needs meaningful, sustainable reform with regard to services provided to incarcerated women. I commend First Lady McCray for championing investment in the future of this at-risk population, including provision of educational, therapeutic, and vocational services that will help in preventing recidivism. It is critical to address the unique medical and psychological issues that female prisoners face, and to provide the foundation for getting back on their feet once they have served their time.”

**Council Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo** said, “I applaud the de Blasio Administration’s investment of resources towards reducing our city’s population of incarcerated women through family reunification and rehabilitation. Incarceration, disproportionately affects communities of color, where families are often faced with poverty, unemployment, and violence that can destabilize the household. As caregivers and heads of household, women play an integral role in the health and wellbeing of their families. It is paramount that we provide the supportive services that will help curb recidivism, empower women, strengthen and enable our communities to thrive.”

“As Criminal Justice Chair, I applaud Mayor de Blasio and First Lady McCray for focusing on incarcerated women and dedicating resources to their recovery. As we focus on the closure of Rikers Island, re-entry programs and behavioral health initiatives are critically important. This announcement helps ensure that jail returns are minimal,” said **Council Member Keith Powers**, chair of the Committee on Criminal Justice.

“Expanding re-entry programs and health services available to women will help prevent future interactions with the criminal justice system and strengthen families. We know that incarcerated women face unique challenges, and it is important that these programs are tailored to address these specific issues. I applaud First Lady McCray for spearheading this critical investment to break the cycle of incarceration for women in New York City,” said **Council Member Rory Lancman**, chair of the Committee on the Justice System.

“The long-term and extensive effects of incarceration on women and their families are finally receiving the attention they deserve. Thanks to the investments announced today by First Lady Chirlane McCray, more focused programming will target the needs of the entire family during and after incarceration, and a broader range of health and re-entry services will also be available to incarcerated women. This is the sort of holistic approach that can help women and their families build a future together, and prevent future returns to jail. Thank you to the First Lady for leading the way on this incredibly important initiative,” said **Council Member Helen Rosenthal**, Chair of the Committee on Women.

“Congratulations to the First Lady on the announcement of this great initiative,” said **Council Member Brad Lander**, Deputy Leader for Policy. “These investments are a strong step toward breaking the cycle of incarceration and reducing the number of women in city jails, which will contribute to our efforts to close Rikers.”

“While we as a city undertake one of the most significant criminal justice overhauls in our history – closing Rikers Island – it is critical that we continue the work of changing the culture of

the criminal justice system by investing in programming and services that benefit and rehabilitate those who find themselves in its grip. The First Lady's announcement today is an important investment in just the kind of culture-changing initiatives needed to effectively achieve the comprehensive reform our criminal justice system requires," said **Council Member Robert Cornegy**.

"Too often in the discussion around criminal justice reform, we fail to focus on the unique needs of the thousands of incarcerated women who do not receive the services needed to help rehabilitate them and prevent recidivism. These new investments in family access, mental health and counseling, and re-entry will help close that gap, and I applaud Mayor Bill de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray for their commitment to these women," said **Council Member Carlina Rivera**. "As the Chair of the new City Council Committee on Hospitals, which conducts oversight of the medical facilities in city jails, I am particularly enthused to see that this investment will go towards much-needed improvements to the emergency and mental health care provided to patients in the women's infirmaries."

"There's no doubt that we need to prevent recidivism in any way we can, and the initiative today led by the First Lady I believe is an innovative approach of supporting a vulnerable population of women in a very comprehensive and intrinsic way," said **Council Member Rafael Salamanca**.

"This ambitious plan will be a huge step in helping women break the cycle of incarceration and I applaud our city's first lady for launching it," said **U.S. Rep. Grace Meng**. "These important and much needed services will greatly assist incarcerated women with re-entering their communities, and helping them to stay out of jail. As a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science, I have strongly advocated for the community-focused Children of Incarcerated Parents Demonstration Program and the Girls in Juvenile Justice Program. We must reduce the revolving door of incarceration and First Lady Chirlane McCray's initiative will go a long way in helping to achieve that goal for women in New York City. I'm proud to support it."

"The importance of family connections and community support for incarcerated individuals cannot be underestimated" said **Assembly Member David Weprin**, Chair of the Assembly Committee on Correction. "By increasing programming, expanding behavioral health services, and supporting incarcerated individuals through re-entry; we not only help women but also work to strengthen our communities and end the cycle of incarceration. I applaud First Lady Chirlane McCray on today's announcement and this initiative to support the women of New York."

**Assembly Member Jo Anne Simon** said, "It is essential that women re-entering society feel well-equipped to find housing, employment, and can access adequate mental health services. Incarcerated women are often the caretakers in their families, which is why programs that foster family connections and expanding visitation are so important. I applaud First Lady Chirlane McCray for her dedication to addressing the unique needs of women who are incarcerated, expanding mental health services, and investing in programs that will help break the cycle of incarceration."

“When women are incarcerated it leaves a detrimental effect directly on those left at home whether it is children, family members, or significant others. Women on the other hand are more likely to develop a history of trauma, mental illness, and substance abuse than men once incarcerated. This investment will introduce programs, resources, re-entry services, and support to loved-ones left behind which will offer hope and a sense of relief to these women who deserve a second chance at life for them and their family members to revitalize the family bond,” said **Assembly Member Carmen De La Rosa**. “I commend First Lady Chirlane McCray for this great initiative that will surely make New York City a role model for other major cities to address the justice system comprehensively for women.”

**Assembly Member Jeffrion L. Aubry** said, “As a long-time advocate for prison and jail reform, this new \$6 million is an encouraging step to address the pressing challenges NYC incarcerated women face. This new investment would increase family visitations, counseling programs, and medical/mental illness treatments. It will also help prepare incarcerated women for re-entry to the workforce.”

“For over thirty years outstanding programs like Hour Children in my Long Island City Community have supported incarcerated women and their children,” said **Assembly Member Catherine Nolan**. “I applaud First Lady Chirlane McCray for this innovative support and resources.”

“This investment is not only the start of breaking the cycle of incarceration of women but the start to mending broken families as well. We need to prevent the occurrences that expose women to the criminal justice system,” said **Assembly Member Latrice Walker**. “As a community, we have to support incarcerated mother’s children and families as they grow up without their mother’s physical presence by donating our time and resources and I applaud First Lady McCray for investing in these women and providing them with a second chance.”

"From healthcare to vocational training, women have always faced unique challenges in our correctional system. Today’s announcement reflects the City’s commitment to breaking the cycle of incarceration and shifting the overall focus of our jail system to supportive and effective rehabilitative services,” said **Assembly Member Nily Rozic**.

“Increasing social services for women is a key step in reforming our criminal justice system” said **Assembly Member Alicia Hyndman**. “We need holistic solutions to break the cycle of incarceration for women and these initiatives are concrete steps to achieve that. I will continue to work with the administration to ensure we reach the goal of reducing the number of women and families impacted by incarceration.”

“The Board of Correction’s Minimum Standards have long recognized the vital importance of quality mental health care and visiting for improving conditions and outcomes, including safety, in jails and upon release. We applaud the First Lady and Mayor’s efforts to meet women in jail’s unique needs in these critical areas,” said **Martha King, Executive Director of the NYC Board of Correction**.

“The First Lady's initiatives offer compassionate and intersectional policy proposals based on reproductive justice for incarcerated mothers and their children, and I'm thankful,” said **Loretta Ross, visiting professor at Hampshire College and co-founder of SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective.**

**Sister Tesa Fitzgerald, CSJ – Executive Director, Hour Children,** said, “Over the course of three decades of Hour Children’s work with incarcerated parents and their children, it has become absolutely clear that an essential component of any effort to reunite and rebuild families is to encourage visitations during a parent’s incarceration. We applaud efforts to expand visitations at Rikers.”

“We applaud the First Lady’s recognition of the importance of visiting for incarcerated women and their children and families. Visiting offers critical benefits for all parties: it promotes transformation/ rehabilitation, safety, child well-being, and successful reentry. Yet visiting Rikers currently is very difficult and not sensitive to the needs of children. There are huge improvements needed in the visiting design and process to provide for quality time. This announcement offers great promise that soon women on Rikers- who receive many fewer visitors than men do- will be able to maintain critical relationships, reducing their likelihood of ever returning and supporting their children's brighter futures. We are eager to roll up our sleeves and support this effort,” said **Elizabeth Gaynes, President and CEO, The Osborne Association.**

**Georgia Lerner, Executive Director, Women’s Prison Association (WPA),** said, “WPA is pleased to see New York City investing in justice-involved women. Mental health needs, parental stress, and a lack of sustained employment are risks unique to women that often lead to justice involvement, but can be much better addressed in the community. We are thrilled to see NYC recognizing the unique needs of women, investing in home and community-based solutions, and working to stabilize families as a means to public safety without a reliance on punitive responses.”

“The Correctional Association is thrilled to see this infusion of resources into critically needed services. Family contact greatly enhances reentry success and makes the process smoother for parents and children alike, especially for mothers who usually are the primary caregivers,” said **Gail Smith, Director of the Women in Prison Project, The Correctional Association of New York.**

**Maria Santangelo, Director of Programs at College & Community Fellowship (CCF),** said, “Women face a unique set of challenges upon their reentry. Trauma, mental illness, substance abuse, and domestic violence are some of the key factors in their involvement with the criminal justice system, and should be taken into account during and after incarceration. At CCF, our evidence-based practices focus on individual guidance as well as a community setting that provides peer support so that each woman can thrive. We applaud the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice for recognizing these needs and providing significant funding to help criminal justice-involved women.”

**Anne Patterson, Division Director, STEPS to End Family Violence,** said, “We at STEPS to End Family are awed by the visionary leadership of Mayor de Blasio, First Lady McCray, and



the entire team at the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice for their inspiring commitment to supporting justice-involved women and their families. By designating \$6 million to be used in such a diverse and holistic way - improving visiting to Rikers while also enhancing behavioral health care both at the jail and within the community - the City is vocally declaring its belief in the inherent worth and wisdom of all justice-involved people and their families. As an organization that has been supporting criminalized survivors of intimate partner violence at Rikers Island for over three decades, we are excited to live in this City at this moment."

**Rita Zimmer, Executive Director, HousingPlus and Women's Community Justice Project (WCJP)**, said, "We applaud all efforts to address the unique needs of justice-involved women and their families at Rikers and in the community. The City has already taken huge steps in this direction by developing new initiatives to reduce the number of women unnecessarily detained at Rikers. When women can stay connected to their families and access the services they need, they are much more likely to successfully reenter the community. The best way to serve justice-involved women and strengthen families is to get them back home and connected to services they need in their neighborhoods. This is what long-term stability for the women, their families, and the community looks like."

**Ronald Richter, CEO of JCCA**, said, "Enhancing and advancing available services to mothers and their children during a mother's incarceration is the right thing to do. The parent/child connection can and should be supported throughout any separation so that the child knows that he or she is loved and not forgotten. Our families' futures depend on the progress we are making through the vision of ThriveNYC."

"Appreciating the intersectional issues that present for many women who are or have been incarcerated—health and mental health, poverty, intimate partner violence, and child and family challenges just to name a few—the Mayor and the First Lady's aim to provide justice involved women with the critical supports they need to overcome and cope with these issues while detained and after they have been released from jail is spot-on", said **Jennifer Jones Austin, the Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director of Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies**. "Only when we provide compassionate care and treat the issues that contribute to many women being incarcerated and re-incarcerated, will we help them and their families to achieve stability and wellbeing."

**Jess Dannhauser, CEO of Graham Windham** said, "These investments are an important step forward for NYC's families. Not only will they help prevent and reduce the incarceration of women, they will protect children from the excruciating experience of being separated from their Mom. We at Graham Windham applaud the Mayor and First Lady for their leadership." "We commend the First Lady and Mayor de Blasio on this important investment to break the cycle of women's incarceration in NYC. We must develop a multifaceted gender-specific strategy that not only connects women to the care and services they need, but also diverts them from entering the system in the first place, allowing them to live safely and productively in their communities with their families. This commitment will make a significant difference in the lives of women, families and communities," said **Ana L. Oliveira, President & CEO of The New York Women's Foundation**.

“The First Lady’s announcement comes at a critical time in our nation’s history. While the ‘Me Too’ movement has cultivated an important national discourse on the mistreatment of women and girls throughout our communities, it has virtually ignored the role that sexual assault, trauma and structural disadvantage continue to play in the lives and pathways of justice-involved women. The chronic lack of gender responsive policies, services and supports for incarcerated and re-entering women and their families deepen the disadvantages that contributed to their incarceration,” said **Alyssa Benedict, executive director of CORE Associates and federal partner at National Resource Center on Justice Involved Women**. “The First Lady’s initiatives have the potential to make a huge impact in NYC as well as inspire cities, counties and states across the country to make targeted and smart investments in justice-involved women. These investments will disrupt their harmful and unnecessary pathways to jail and prison, protect and strengthen children and families, and bolster community safety nets. They are directly linked to improved economic and public health outcomes and are the essence of human, social and community justice. I could not be more excited about this timely initiative and applaud the First Lady’s commitment to women, children and communities.”

“Built on the profound success of ThriveNYC, First Lady Chirlane McCray's transformational new initiative demonstrates a powerful shift in the way that the unique challenges, needs and pathways of women are addressed throughout the justice system. For too long, our nation has failed to systemically confront the reality that these pathways are disproportionately paved by gender-based violence, trauma and related substance abuse, mental illness and poverty -- particularly among women from communities of color. By shifting resources from a punitive to a public health approach, this initiative will empower countless survivors to change their trajectories, as well as that of the thousands of children that all-too-often share their sentences,” said **Deanne Benos, Director of the Women's Justice Institute (WJI)** who also serves as Co-Chair of the American Probation & Parole Association (APPA) National Women & Girls Committee.

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