

For immediate release

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MAYOR DE BLASIO MUST FIRE DOC COMMISSIONER, ADDRESS HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS IN NYC JAILS

The following statement can be attributed to the Jails Action Coalition

“On March 19, the New York Daily News reported [two more tragedies](#) at the hands of the Department of Correction. The two deaths this month add to a horrendous record of both mismanagement and callous disregard for the lives of incarcerated people that has characterized Commissioner Cynthia Brann’s tenure, with no repercussions from the Mayor. **If it were not already clear, it must be now - this Commissioner and her department cannot and will not keep people in their custody safe. The Mayor must fire Commissioner Cynthia Brann immediately.**

The stresses of Covid-19 have only added to the long-running human rights crisis in New York City’s jails. Commissioner Brann has defiantly defended her Department through years of abuse and indifference, at times snapping at Board of Correction members who question her. On her watch, [uses of force have increased](#) to 259% of their 2015 levels. Her failure to hold her staff accountable for their brutality caused a federal monitor to place the Department under a remedial order, citing a “history of non-compliance [that] is longstanding and substantial.” Deaths and suicides in the jails have also increased, and include Layleen Polanco’s tragic death in solitary confinement. Staff members who failed to check on Layleen, and laughed when they found her unresponsive in her cell, were disciplined only after the Board of Correction issued a report and released the video footage of the officers’ cruelty. Meanwhile, other family members who lost loved ones on Rikers, like the family of Christopher Cruz, continue to wait, more than 6 months later, for any details about what happened to them.

The Commissioner’s failed leadership has affected her staff too. Recent reports found officers at times working triple shifts, while the Department employs the largest uniformed correctional workforce in the nation relative to the number of people in their custody. New Yorkers pay the price for this not only in moral but also in financial terms: last year, the Department spent [more than \\$447,000 per incarcerated person](#), with abysmal results.

Mayor de Blasio must fire Commissioner Brann immediately, but this is only the first step.

Preventing more deaths will require the Mayor to act *with urgency* to fully and completely end solitary confinement in all of its forms; to call on police, judges and district attorneys to stop filling the jails (now fuller than they were before Covid); and to finally divest from a Department that has used its vast resources to do so much harm.

If the Mayor believes that lives of incarcerated people matter, now is the time to show it.”

The New York City Jails Action Coalition (JAC) is a coalition of activists that includes formerly incarcerated and currently incarcerated people, family members, and community members who are working to promote human rights, dignity, and safety for people in New York City jails.