



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE
JUNE 15, 2022**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. Thank you to Chair Diana Ayala and the members of the Committee on General Welfare for holding this hearing today.

I am pleased to share that the number of youth who are incarcerated in New York and nationwide is shrinking. However, we must still be vigilant about how our young people in secure detention facilities are being treated. I am particularly concerned about the use of restraints, including transitional holds, and room confinements in these facilities. That is why I have introduced Resolution 0035-2022, which calls on the New York State Office of Children and Family Services to prohibit juvenile justice agencies from using room confinement as a form of restraint in secure detention facilities and from using transitional holds as a form of restraint in detention and placement facilities.

The Administration for Children's Services defines room confinement as the involuntary confinement of a youth in a room, including the youth's own room, when locked in or when the youth is authoritatively told not to leave. In recent years, juvenile justice practitioners, researchers, and advocates have raised awareness of the harms of room confinement or isolation of youth in detention and residential facilities, including negative impacts on young people's developing brains and mental and emotional health. Isolating youth is especially dangerous for young people with disabilities, psychiatric diagnoses, and histories of trauma and abuse, who are overrepresented in youth detention facilities. Despite the wealth of research on the negative and harmful effects of isolation and confinement for young people, many facilities continue to rely on the practice.

A transitional hold, or prone restraint, is a brief physical restraint that consists of pinning a person face-down on the ground. This is a dangerous practice that not only puts young people in danger of physical harm—including death—but is often traumatic and frightening. It is not therapeutic nor does it de-escalate emotionally charged situations. In fact, the trauma and psychological harm that incarcerated youth experience while isolated or restrained make young people and staff less safe, as it only perpetuates cycles of trauma, distressed behavior, and escalation. Trauma leads to changes in the brain, leading to hypervigilance, distress, and escalation or fight or flight responses in response to compliance demands, resulting in more

punishment and trauma.

Many advocacy organizations and other jurisdictions across the country have outlined and implemented ways for detention facility staff to hold youth accountable for their actions without causing more harm, and how to implement safe and healthy practices for everyone. It is time to end these dangerous and harmful practices and replace them with what we know keeps young people safe, including positive reinforcement and de-escalation techniques. Secure detention facilities are home to many of New York's most vulnerable youth, and I look forward to working with the City Council and the State Legislature to protect and support these young people and establish practices that we know keep us safe. Thank you, and please vote yes on Resolution 0035-2022.