

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/nyc-to-ban-solitary-confinement-for-people-21-and-under/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

New York City officials announced a plan Tuesday to ban solitary confinement for people 21 and younger amid scrutiny over horrific conditions at the city's notorious jail complex, Rikers Island, according to news reports. The decision comes on the heels of mounting criticism from advocacy groups, including [Children's Rights](#), who condemned the use of excessive solitary confinement for young people up to age 25. These groups cited research that shows prolonged isolation can have a serious, long-term impact on the cognitive and social abilities of some of the most vulnerable young people in society. According to the [New York Times](#):

Inmates in solitary confinement at Rikers are locked in their cells for 23 hours a day, with one hour of recreation, which they spend by themselves in a small caged area outdoors. They can be locked away for weeks and months and, in some cases, even over a year. As of Jan. 9, according to recently released city data, there were 497 inmates between ages 19 and 21 at Rikers, with 103 of them held in solitary confinement.

The city's Board of Correction approved the plan unanimously 7-0. On top of banning solitary confinement for people 21 and under, the new initiative also calls for a reduction in the maximum amount of time anyone age 18 or older can spend in solitary confinement, from 90 to 30 days.

With these reforms, New York City has taken an important stand for basic human rights and reaffirmed its commitment to the safety of prisoners, prison staff and our communities, said Donna Lieberman, director of the New York Civil Liberties Union. An institution as profoundly broken as Rikers Island will require wholesale reform to transform into a humane environment that emphasizes treatment and rehabilitation over punishment and isolation, and these rules are a major step forward.

Union officials, including Norman Seabrook, president of the 9,000-member correction officers union, condemned the plan, saying it would endanger correction officers and lead to more inmate attacks.

I'm deeply, deeply bothered by a decision that you would make, jeopardizing the safety and security of inmates and officers, he told the board.

Correction Commissioner Joseph Ponte, who was chosen by Mayor Bill de Blasio to spearhead reform at Rikers Island, said getting young people out of solitary confinement will drive down violence. He says he's confident that he'll be able to get the necessary resources from the city to put the plan in place next year.

The idea we lock people up for any length of time and don't provide them with programs or treatments does not lead to good outcomes, he said. It seems to defy logic.

The plan is expected to take effect in January 2016.

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