TESTIMONY OF:

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My name is Kimberly Nasatir and I am a licensed master social worker at Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS). At BDS we represent over 45,000 justice-involved individuals each year, and of those individuals, about 6,000 are incarcerated in the custody of the Department of Corrections (DOC) during the pendency of their cases.

One of our BDS clients, now an advocate for the rights of incarcerated individuals as a result of her own experience at Rikers Island, brought to our attention a re-entry book called *Connections: A guide for formerly incarcerated people in New York City* published by the New York Public Library. We also learned, through a survey conducted throughout our office that less than 1% of our staff had ever heard of *Connections* or seen our detained clients in possession of this book. Few clients knew of it. This year marks 20th anniversary of the book's publication.

BDS feels that a guide specifically targeted for individuals returning to their community, including basic steps to re-entry among additional resources in each of the five boroughs, should be in every individual's hand during their time in custody. The New York City Department of Corrections (DOC), apparently agrees, listing in the "Inmate Handbook" that every person "should have been given [*Connections*] upon admission." Yet, clients are processed through intake, and almost no one receives the book. We have also come to know that some of our clients do not receive their "Inmate Handbook," the list of rules and regulations that someone who is detained must rely on to know their rights and obligations. Further, detained individuals are required, during intake, to sign for both books, even though they do not receive them. Everyone should be given both books without exception.

This issue is twofold: we know that when a client has some control of her future, with a resource re-entry guide that can either equip her to take steps immediately upon release towards self-help

and self-promotion, she will be less likely to be re-arrested. We believe that NYPL has created a resource that speaks to prevention of recidivism that should not be ignored.

The second part of this issue is that the Inmate Handbook must be provided at intake as a protective mechanism. Often, we know that issues arise between DOC officers and detained individuals, and we believe that if both parties have a guide to be clear about rules and rights, this is one step closer to eliminating misunderstandings on the part of our clients and on the part of the DOC officers. We have heard stories that rules "have changed without notification" and this book offers detained clients and DOC a consistent set of guidelines that cannot be contested.

We believe these two books go hand in hand, and we ask that legislation be put into action that requires the DOC to fulfill their obligation during intake to provide the NYPL *Connections* re-entry guide and the "Inmate Handbook." We further request a tracking mechanism to ensure these items are actually distributed.

City Council is considering new legislation today, a Bill of Rights to be read out loud and provided in writing to every individual during intake. This very important time for an individual in the process of being incarcerated can be more comprehensive and impactful if both *Connections* and the "Inmate Handbook" are part of this bill.

New York City has endless resources, many funded by the City, that go untapped and underutilized. *Connections* can be a linkage to strengthen individual ties to community resources that already exist, which we believe will ultimately result in reducing the number of people incarcerated in City jails.

I thank the New York City Council Committee on Fire and Criminal Justice, and particularly Chair Elizabeth Crowley and Councilmember Daniel Dromm for this opportunity to testify before you today.