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*****For Immediate Release*****

Brooklyn Defenders' Statement on the Appointment of Stanley Richards as the New Commissioner of the City's Department of Correction

(BROOKLYN, NY) – Brooklyn Defenders issued the following statement in response to the [announcement](#) of the appointment of Stanley Richards, who was named Commissioner of the New York City Department of Correction:

“Brooklyn Defenders congratulates Stanley Richards on his appointment as Commissioner of New York City’s Department of Correction. We are heartened by Mayor Mamdani’s decision to appoint Commissioner Richards to head the Department at this critical moment. Deplorable, violent and neglectful conditions have persisted at crisis levels on Rikers Island for decades and the lives of thousands of New Yorkers have been invariably damaged and remain at risk as Commissioner Richards takes the helm of this billion-dollar agency. We urge Mayor Mamdani and Commissioner Richards to move quickly to create lasting and humane reforms to the jails for the betterment of all New Yorkers.

Commissioner Richards brings to this role decades of lived and professional experience, nationally recognized leadership, and a deep commitment to confronting the egregious and dangerous conditions on Rikers Island. During his tenure at The Fortune Society, most recently as its president and CEO, Commissioner Richards strived for individualized and humane treatment and programming, discharge planning from incarceration, and alternatives to incarceration. He has been a vocal advocate for closing the Rikers Island jail complex while creating smaller, borough-based facilities rooted in dignity, opportunity, and humanity. Brooklyn Defenders strongly supports this solution along with a drastic reduction to the jail population, including maximizing the early release options for those who are sentenced to city jail terms.

As public defenders representing people held in the custody of the Department of Correction, we see every day the profound human cost of incarceration and the urgent need for strong leadership

over the pretrial incarceration of New Yorkers. People in DOC custody are exposed to daily violence and indignities while being denied basic necessities. Our city jails are a deathtrap where tragically more than 100 people have died in Department custody over the past 10 years, almost entirely due to medical and other forms of neglect. The denial of access to adequate medical care is pervasive and results in needless suffering, physical and mental deterioration as well as an unjustifiable risk of death. Over three years ago, the Department was ordered to provide people in custody with access to health care without delay in litigation (*Agnew v. DOC*) brought, in part, by BDS and The Legal Aid Society. These issues can and should be remedied by the Department under the leadership of Commissioner Richards.

The [recent appointment](#) of Nicholas Deml as the remediation manager for Rikers by U.S. District Judge Swain at the same time as the appointment of Commissioner Richards creates a unique opportunity for impactful change within our jail system and an end to the excessive use of force, culture of neglect and degradation, extended lock-ins and solitary confinement, and lack of basic necessities such as mattresses, food, clothing and health care.

We call on Commissioner Richards to end violence and use of force against incarcerated people, end the use of illegal and inhumane solitary confinement, cease the mass surveillance and data gathering of people in custody and their loved ones, and ensure safe housing for vulnerable people, such as transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary and intersex people, youth, and people experiencing mental illness. We encourage Commissioner Richards and his team to bring back meaningful programs to Rikers, such as education, job training, college classes, art, music, and restorative practices that are humane and help people re-enter society after incarceration with the knowledge and skills to succeed.

Brooklyn Defenders stands ready to work towards these shared goals with Commissioner Richards and Mr. Deml as we move towards a smaller and more humane correctional system in New York City.”

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Brooklyn Defender Services is a public defense office whose mission is to provide outstanding representation and advocacy free of cost to people facing loss of freedom, family separation and other serious legal harms by the government. www.bds.org