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**Testimony of Melissa Iachan to the New York City  
City Planning Commission  
ULURP Hearing on Rikers Island Public Place Mapping,  
September 2, 2020**

Good morning, my name is Melissa Iachan, and I am a Senior Staff Attorney in the Environmental Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. NYLPI works with communities across the New York City area to combat inequality, injustice, and infringements of civil rights. Our Environmental Justice program has advocated to end the inequitable distribution of environmental burdens in our City for over two decades.

NYLPI has long partnered with the movement to close Rikers due to our strong belief that the decrepit facilities built on a deteriorating landfill pose serious health hazards to all detainees and employees on Rikers Island. Our environmental justice work has led us to join the ever-growing chorus of voices demanding the City swiftly and permanently shutter the corrections facility, and explore the possibilities to use the space on Rikers Island for renewable energy infrastructure.

NYLPI spent more than two years collecting documents from various City agencies regarding the environmental conditions at Rikers and detainee health conditions. Our survey showed that the environmental conditions at Rikers Island correctional facilities pose a direct threat to human health and well-being. In particular, the plumbing is so dysfunctional that facilities systematically fail to provide clean running water and properly working sewage systems, contributing to conditions that exacerbate a number of illnesses and health challenges for detainees, COVID-19 being the most recent. The picture that these documents paint illustrates the urgency to close the Island as a correctional facility as soon as possible.

NYLPI supports the current proposal to amend the City Map to establish Rikers Island as a Public Place by no later than January 1, 2027. Our hope is that the Island's jails are shuttered in advance of that date, though, as each and every day that human beings continue to be detained there represent our City violating the human dignity and rights of those individuals. Nobody deserves to be confined in such squalid conditions, in particular during a pandemic of the proportion of COVID. If the urgency to push through a solution to permanently shutter these

jails weren't evident enough before, after these last few months we hope that this is something that most can agree on: we must closer Rikers as soon as possible, and by no later than January 1, 2027.

We urge every Commissioner and City official whose input will be required to continue to listen to the impacted individuals and survivors of Rikers as this process moves forward, and in particular as to the importance of restorative justice as we not only look to a future where Rikers Island is officially deemed a Public Place, but when it can provide direct benefits to those communities who were most impacted by its legacy of overincarceration and trauma.

In particular, we look forward to continue working with and uplifting the voices of those who have returned from Rikers who are leading in the conversation about the need for a Renewable Rikers—a vision where the 413 acres are no longer used to detain, inflict pain, and imprison but rather where this land represents the a greener, cleaner, more sustainable future for our City, providing previously incarcerated individuals with the opportunity for good green jobs, while being able to know that their communities are breathing cleaner air.

We look forward to continuing our work with our partners in the Freedom Agenda, the Renewable Rikers coalition, the City Council, and the Administration to ensure that Rikers is closed as quickly and as soon as possible, that the detainee population continues to decrease, and that investments are made not only in communities, but in transforming the blight of Rikers Island into for a source of renewable energy for our future...truly the only thing that the toxic island should be used for at all.

Thank you.