

Tel: 566-5090

297-82

For Release:
Thursday, December 2, 1982

STATEMENT BY MAYOR EDWARD I. KOCH

During the public hearing process regarding the proposed adult and juvenile detention facilities at White Street, we have heard strong opposition to building the juvenile center on the same site as the adult facility. I have given careful consideration to the concerns that have been expressed, but I still believe that the proposal deals with those concerns.

Over the past four years, the city has worked toward the goal of replacing the Spofford Juvenile Center, with humane, decentralized facilities for juveniles. The plan being considered by the Board of Estimate represents the first step in meeting that goal. It offers the opportunity to construct a "state-of-the-art" facility, with small living units considered important in providing a more normal environment for youths in custody. The location, much closer to Manhattan, Brooklyn and Staten Island courts, and to the families of more of the youths in custody, is decidedly better than the location of a single center in the Bronx.

However, the local community and juvenile justice organizations, for philosophical reasons, have opposed this facility. They feel that locating the juvenile and adult facilities on the same site will be detrimental to the youths being detained there. Despite the fact that the juvenile facility will be entirely in compliance with the spirit and the letter of the regulations regarding sight and sound separation, they feel such separation will not be possible.

In addition, as we learned during the public hearing today and in earlier meetings with juvenile welfare and citizens' organizations, Spofford may be a better institution today than it was in 1978 when I and others supported efforts to replace it. In fact, I have heard from people who believe that Spofford is better than the new

(more)

(2)

facility would be. I have decided to accomodate the varying points of view on this Board on this aspect of the facility. Wherever possible, it is better to have consensus.

The city will step back and re-assess its direction in providing secure housing for detained juveniles. It may well be possible to renovate Spofford to meet the city's stated objective of providing a safe, humane and secure detention environment for juveniles who must be held in the custody of the city.

###

Tel: 566-5090

298-82

For Release:

Thursday, December 2, 1982

STATEMENT BY MAYOR EDWARD I. KOCH

To accommodate an inmate population that has increased over 25% in less than 2 years, and in response to judicial mandates for improvements in the City's correctional system, the City must construct additional detention space. Whenever the City undertakes a project such as building a jail, which is in the public interest, the complicated question of siting the new facility must be addressed. The proposal before us today, the construction of a new detention facility in Lower Manhattan to house 500 adult detainees has brought the countervailing issues involved in site selection and the municipal responsibility to build a jail into sharp focus. I have carefully considered the community's concerns and suggestions regarding this proposal. However, I am convinced that the advantages of this site, in terms of the opportunity it affords for increasing the efficiency of the criminal justice system, more rapid disposition of cases, and for realizing the operational savings from sharing services with the renovated Tombs, will result in benefits to the entire City, and cannot be ignored.

The City has a critical need to build a new jail to replace the House of Detention for Men (HDM) on Rikers Island. In response to a class action suit challenging conditions of confinement on behalf of all detainees who were or would be housed in HDM, the City agreed in federal district court to

close that institution by 1985. The conditions violative of detainee rights included the inaccessibility of the Island as it related to access to counsel, transportation to court, and visiting, as well as the physical layout of the institution, including its overall size and the size and configuration of the cellblocks, making it unsuitable for housing pre-trial detainees. The facility lacks adequate light, air and heat and suffers high noise levels, contributing to a pressured and tense environment.

Exacerbating the adverse conditions in HDM, the City's entire correctional system is severely overcrowded. The population today is 10,200 (110% of capacity) representing an increase of over 25% in less than 2 years, and an increase of 45% since 1978. Through renovation and new construction the City has added over 1,000 beds to existing institutions over the last 4 years. As a result, however, mandatory services, particularly transportation, have been overtaxed. New facilities are necessary.

Possibly of greatest importance, new jail construction to hold both detainees and those convicted is necessary to ensure the safety of the City's streets and to preserve the integrity of judicial decision-making. Anyone seriously concerned about the problem of crime in our society must recognize the importance of providing adequate facilities which ensure a safe, secure, and humane environment for those in custody.

In attempting to site new correctional facilities, the Department of Correction developed a set of criteria intended to ensure minimal intrusion into the surrounding area and maximum cost effectiveness. Criteria included consideration of such site specific elements as: proximity to courts, public transportation and other correctional facilities, non-adjacency to residential uses, and minimal site preparation and demolition cost. The White Street jail, before us today, meets all these criteria. It is accessible to the Tombs (presently under reconstruction) and the Manhattan Criminal Courts building, across the street from the Supreme Court building and one block from the Family Court. It is in fact, in the criminal justice corridor at the northern end of the civic center.

Siting jails for pre-trial detainees near courthouses is sensible because it promotes the efficiency of the criminal justice system, reduces tension in the institution and is cost-effective. The entire system's efficiency is enhanced because attorney and probation officer access to detained clients is facilitated, thereby speeding court dispositions. Jails located in the boroughs promoted continued familial relationships, reducing the tension and frustration of incarceration (visitation rates at borough houses of detention are 50% higher than on Rikers Island) and expedite bail-making. Borough facilities also make it easier to attract and retain

vital voluntary services and civilian employees, both essential in reducing costs to the system. Costs involved in transporting detainees to court are significantly reduced. Currently, the Department of Correction must transport over 400 prisoners a day, or 2,000 a week, to Manhattan courthouses from Rikers Island. Construction of the White Street jail, along with the reconstruction of the Tombs, will reduce transportation costs by almost \$2 million a year. Together, these two facilities will house 926 detainees, not enough to handle even 50% of the detainees with Manhattan cases (the rest will stay on Rikers Island), and only half the number of prisoners housed in the Tombs before it was closed in 1974. At its height the Tombs held over 2,000 prisoners.

The White Street site affords the City savings offered by no other site in lower Manhattan. It is adjacent to the Tombs as well as the Criminal Court, would provide additional operating savings of \$1.7 million as services would be consolidated or shared; these include food and medical services, the receiving room, commissary, laundry services, storehouse and perimeter patrol.

While I understand that some communities feel threatened by institutions such as a detention center, in fact these facilities bring large numbers of peace officers into the community. In addition, the building can be designed without bars and to blend into the community. A good example is the Metropolitan Correctional Center. The proposed facility at White Street envisions a passageway connecting it to the Tombs and the courthouse so that inmates will never be seen. Large, interior visitor waiting rooms will

be planned so that there is minimal street activity. In order to further enhance the facility's acceptability, and to minimize any possible aesthetic intrusion, the City will build 25,000 square feet of commercial space on the ground floor. In fact, everything possible will be done to ease the burden which the communities located adjacent to the facility have expressed that they feel.

Approval of the White Street jail provides the best solution to outstanding problems in improving our correctional department. It will enable the City to construct a jail which is in compliance with all of the physical standards cited by the plaintiffs in pending litigation against the City. It remedies the issues of accessibility to court, attorneys and visitors, and it is cost-effective.

Given all these considerations, I vote approval of this site for the purpose of constructing a jail.