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Exclusive: Violence Down Sharply at Horizon Juvenile Center in Bronx, Records Show

🕒 March 21, 2019 👤 Kevin Deutsch ➔ Bronx DA, Crime, Lawsuits 💬 0



Pictured: Horizon Juvenile Center, which was plagued by violence following the implementation of New York's "Raise the Age" law. Credit: Google Maps

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MOTT HAVEN – When Horizon Juvenile Center opened its doors to teenage inmates from Rikers Island in October, violence from the squalid jail came with them. Children brawled, correction officers were attacked, and force was routinely used on inmates.

Six months later, day-to-day life at the youth **detention facility** is significantly calmer, city correction officials say. Violent incidents are down sharply, with assaults on Horizon staffers falling from 21 in October to 5 in February. Inmate fights decreased from 44 to 10 during that same period, with recorded use of force incidents plummeting from 84 to 15.

The official city data, obtained exclusively by *Bronx Justice News*, shows 16 and 17-year-olds are leading lives less permeated by the kind of **institutional violence** they experienced at Rikers.

“We are proud of the culture change at Horizon and of the hard work of our officers, who have kept staff and residents safe and maintained order after some early challenges,” city Department of Correction Press Secretary Jason Kersten said. “Because of their efforts, Horizon is dramatically safer than it was when it first opened and has become one of our model facilities.”

Assaults on Staff: Oct: 21 Nov: 7 Dec: 3 Jan: 8 Feb: 5
Inmate fights: Oct: 44 Nov: 35 Dec: 30 Jan: 28 Feb: 10
Uses of Force: Oct: 84 Nov: 42 Dec: 52 Jan: 53 Feb: 15
Source: New York City Department of Correction

buy Premarin generic Pictured: Official city data for Horizon Juvenile Center.

The transfer of Rikers’ youngest inmates off the island was the result of New York’s “Raise the Age” law, which mandates that 16- and 17-year-old offenders no longer be automatically prosecuted as adults. Before the law’s passage, New York was one of just two states that still considered anyone over 15 an adult under criminal law, and thus subject to harsher penalties.



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“Raise the Age” also mandated that those underage prisoners — teens who for decades were housed at Rikers — be detained at juvenile facilities like Horizon instead. The law was passed in response to research showing teenage brains are different from those of adults, and that detention in adult jails places children at greater risk of recidivism and assault.

Nearly 100 teens were moved from Rikers to Horizon on Oct. 1, setting off weeks of violence involving inmates and staffers. A **video** of teens and correction officers brawling went viral shortly after the transfer, triggering widespread criticism of the facility and calls from the correction officers’ union to close Horizon.

“The majority of uses of force were in response to outright spontaneous group disturbances, some of which were serious episodes of collective violence,” Steve Martin, the court-appointed federal monitor tasked with **examining** the city’s treatment of teenage inmates, wrote in a recent **report**.

Martin called Horizon’s early difficulties “inevitable” because the transferees, accustomed to life on Rikers, needed time to adjust to their new surroundings.

To stem the violence, officials from the Department of Correction and Administration of Children’s Services — which jointly run the facility at 560 Brook Ave. — said they improved Horizon’s safety measures and revamped the center’s programming and education services.

The inmate population has also changed over time; Roughly 80 percent of the teens initially transferred from Rikers are no longer at the facility, officials said. Horizon currently has a total count of 60 inmates, 21 of whom came from Rikers, officials said.

Among the safety measures city correction officials said turned the facility around:

- Attaching school classroom furniture to the floor
- “Frosting” classroom windows to “limit distractions during class”
- Increasing Horizon’s staff and programming hours

- Creating a new school schedule that “minimizes unnecessary movement” in hallways
- Limiting the number of inmates escorted around Horizon at any one time “to reduce any unnecessary congestion and possible fights”

The correction officers union, a vocal opponent of “Raise The Age,” has filed lawsuits against both the city and state claiming they should not be legally bound to work at youth facilities, and should also have the right to use pepper spray on teenage inmates when necessary.

State law currently prohibits such use without a waiver, which the city said it applied for following the early violence at Horizon, but has not received. State officials said the city didn’t submit the required documentation to receive such a waiver.

Either way, pepper spray has never been used at Horizon, officials say, with staffers relying instead on training and de-escalation techniques to keep order.

The correction officer’s union did not respond to requests seeking comment.

Even before “Raise the Age,” Horizon was a magnet for controversy. Last year, federal prosecutors in Manhattan opened an investigation into whether inmates were sexually abused at the facility, [reports](#) said.

Another report from the federal monitor is expected in the coming months.



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Kevin Deutsch is a Staff Writer for Bronx Justice News covering Bronx Courts. An award-winning journalist, Deutsch is the author of the true crime books "Pill City" and "The Triangle." He has worked on staff at the Daily News, Miami Herald, Newsday, The Palm Beach Post, and The Riverdale Press. His work has also appeared in Newsweek, Columbia Journalism Review, The New York Times, The Village Voice, The Forward, The Independent, Huffington Post, and the New York Post, among other publications. A Bronx resident, Deutsch hosts the true crime podcast "A Dark Turn" on the Authors on the Air Global Radio Network.



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