



NEW YORK CITY COMPTROLLER  
**BRAD LANDER**

# The State of New York City Jails

One Year of Measuring Jail  
Operations and Management on  
the Comptroller's DOC Dashboard

August 2023

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## Introduction

On July 23, 44-year-old Curtis Davis was found unresponsive at the George R. Vierno Center on Rikers Island, where he was awaiting trial on assault charges. Two correction officers and an assistant deputy warden were put on leave following his death, reportedly for failing to make their rounds in the facility.<sup>1</sup> This was the seventh death of someone in or recently released from custody in 2023, and fifth where staff were disciplined for not conducting proper oversight.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> McCarthy, Craig. "NYC DOC Staffers Suspended Following Latest Rikers Island Inmate Death." New York Post, July 25, 2023. <https://nypost.com/2023/07/25/three-doc-staffers-suspended-following-latest-inmate-death/>.

<sup>2</sup> Special Report by the Nunez Independent Monitor, August 7, 2023.

Since January 2022, at least twenty-six people have died in custody in New York City's jails, underscoring the persistent dysfunction and violence of the jail system and accelerating calls for more oversight of jail operations. At the direction of Comptroller Brad Lander, the New York City Comptroller's Office began publishing monthly statistics in August 2022 on management and operational issues to monitor the Department of Correction's (DOC) progress addressing the ongoing crisis in the city's jails. This report summarizes trends in key metrics of the state of the jail system and the agency's operations over the course of the past year.

Over the past year, despite some metrics trending in positive directions, high levels of violence and continued staffing issues persist. While slashings and stabbings and assaults against staff trended downwards in recent months after peaking in 2021, incidents of fights spiked significantly and allegations of excessive use of force remain alarmingly high. On average 17% of the Department's staff were unavailable for work due to illness or medical leave on any given day over the past year, a decline from the peak in 2021 when upwards of 27% of staff called out sick. In the first four months of Fiscal Year 2023, the city's non-DOC uniformed workforces saw absence rates between 5 and 9 percent, in comparison.<sup>3</sup> Yet, double and triple shifts remain prevalent and monthly overtime earned per employee rose from approximately \$1,500 per month before the pandemic to \$4,200 as of June 2023. The ratio of staff to detained people remains nearly four times the national average.<sup>4</sup>

The number and share of people detained and diagnosed with serious mental illness rose significantly, from under 700 in July 2020 to over 1,200 as of May 2023. One-in-five people detained have serious mental health illness, while half have some kind of mental health diagnosis.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the number of missed medical appointments increased 21% as of the most recently available data, a trend that began at the outset of the pandemic. No additional mental health services have been added, and a program to house severely ill people in secure facilities at Bellevue and other Health and Hospitals facilities is delayed.

Over the past year, the number of people detained in facilities on Rikers Island grew steadily from 5,708 on August 1, 2022 to 6,182 on August 1, 2023. 5,403 people were detained pretrial – representing 87% of the current jail population. The share of people detained pretrial increased 6.5% since August 2022, with approximately one-in-five held on monetary bail. Department of Correction leadership has indicated that they expect the jail population to continue growing, despite the fact that the City's plan to close the deteriorating facilities on Rikers Island necessitates reducing the jail population through reforms to monetary bail, speedier trials, and greater use of alternatives to incarceration to meet the 3,300-bed capacity of the planned Borough-Based Jails.

<sup>3</sup> Preliminary Mayor's Management Report, 2023: [paid absence rates.pdf \(nyc.gov\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> As of mid-year 2021, the national average was approximately 3.6:1 people detained per staff. NYC jails are currently operating at a ratio of more than 1:1. Zhen Zeng, *Jail Inmates in 2021 – Statistical Tables* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2022), 16, [perma.cc/P6AW-MASJ](#).

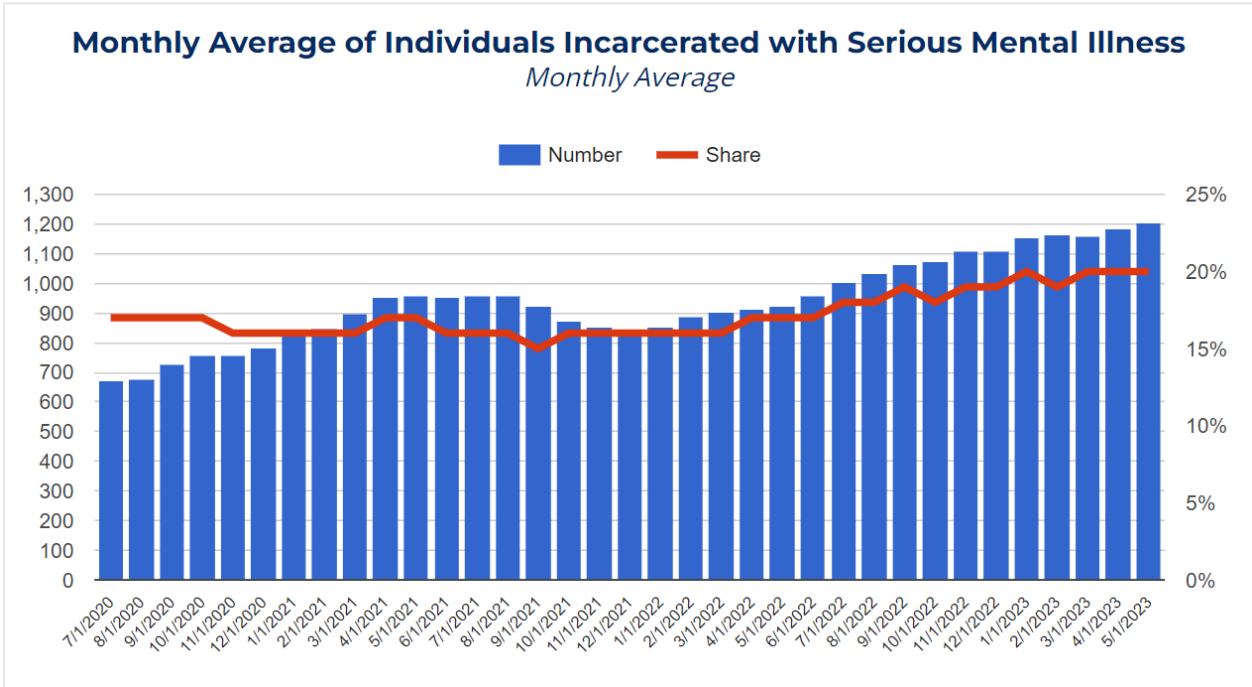
<sup>5</sup> Preliminary Mayor's Management Report, 2023: <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2023/doc.pdf>

# Detailed Indicators: Jail Conditions

## Serious Mental Illness

- The number of individuals with a serious mental illness reached a three-year peak in May 2023, climbing to a monthly average of 1,207 individuals, or 20% of the jail population.<sup>6</sup>
- The share of incarcerated people with a serious mental illness increased 2% since August 2022, with the number of individuals nearly doubling since 2020, from 672 to 1,207.
- 50 percent of people detained have some kind of mental health diagnosis.

Chart 1



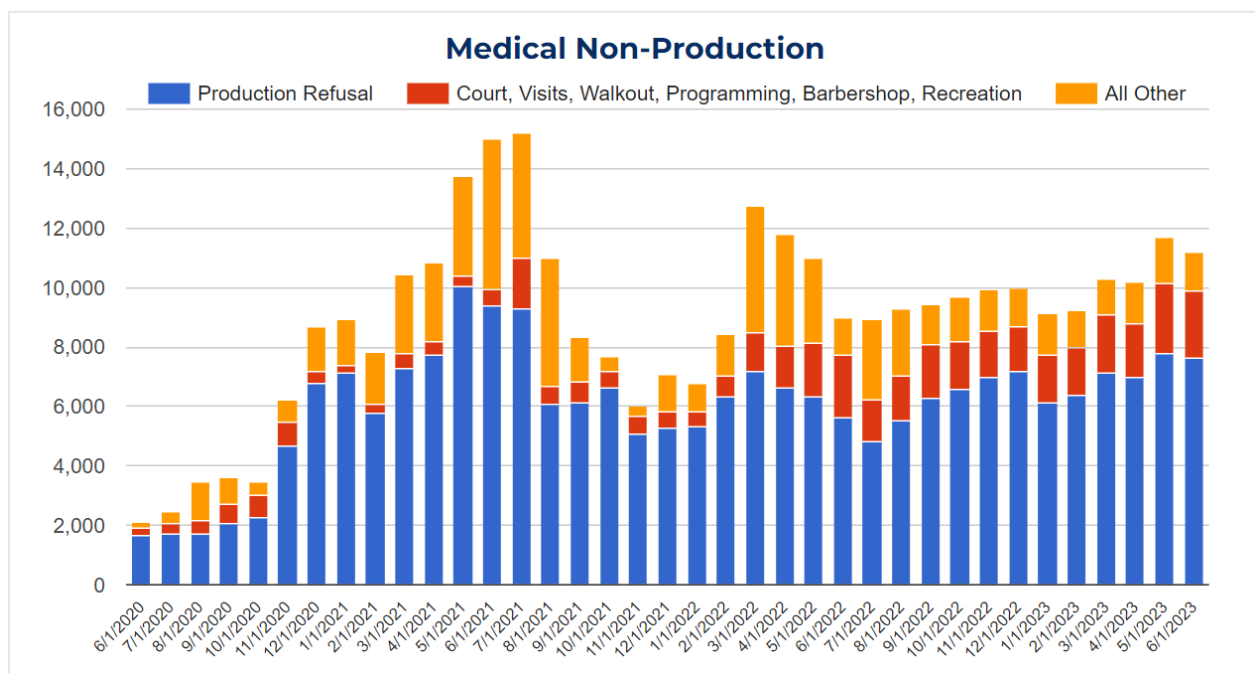
Source: NYC Comptroller's Office analysis of Correctional Health Services' Local Law 59 reports, <https://www.nychealthandhospitals.org/correctionalhealthservices/publications-reports/> and Vera Institute of Justice, Jail Viz 2.0, <https://greaterjusticenyc.vera.org/nycjail/>.

<sup>6</sup> Data is currently available through June 11. The average for June 1-June 11 is 1,231.

## Medical non-production

- The most recent monthly reports show an increase in the total number of medical appointments missed by people in custody, rising from 9,259 in August 2022 to 11,176 in June 2023, an increase of 21%.
- This increase extends an upward trend that has considerably risen since the outset of the pandemic.
- The timeline for more than 350 outposted therapeutic beds operated by Correctional Health Services for people in need of more direct medical care [has been extended](#).

## Chart 2

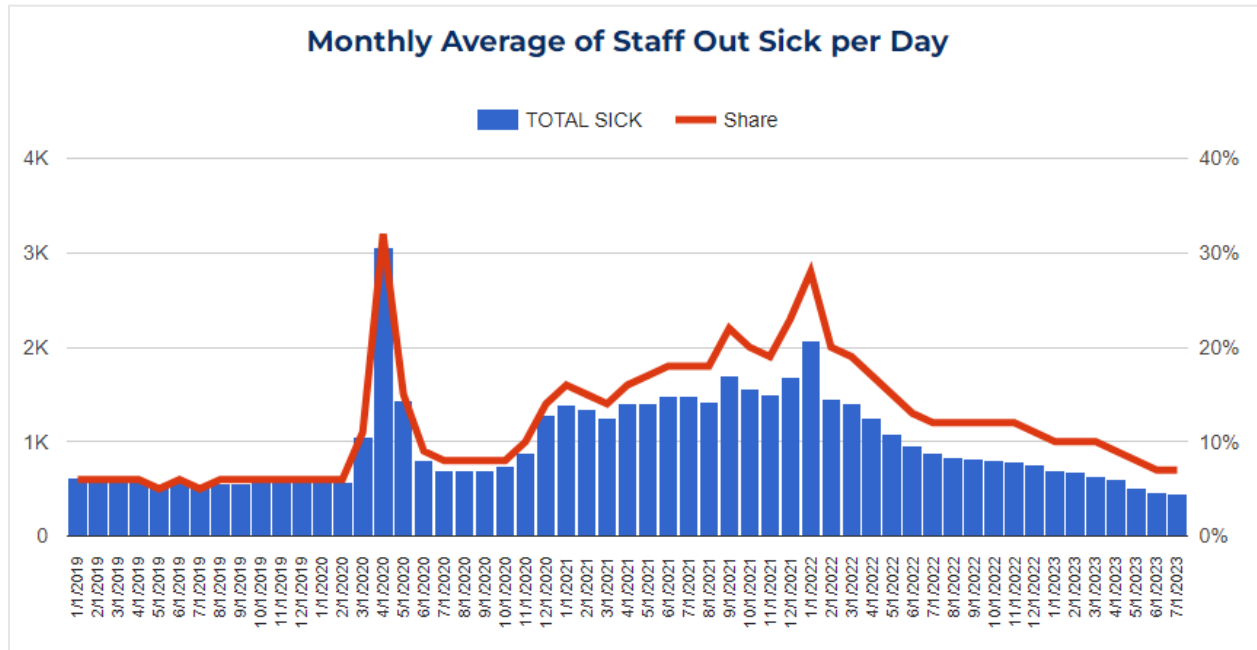


Source: New York City Department of Correction, Monthly Medical Non-Production Reports, <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doc/about/monthly-medical-reports.page>.

## Staffing

- As of July 2023, DOC has a total of 6,403 uniformed staff members, a decrease of 665, or 9%, since August 2022.
- After staff absences peaked in 2022, when upwards of 28% of uniformed staff called out sick, the current share of staff unavailable to work declined. An average of 7% utilized sick leave on any given day of July 2023, a decline of 5% from August 2022, while an additional 6% are medically restricted from contact with people in custody.
- The absolute number of staff out sick is 442 as of July 2023, 389 fewer than in August of last year.

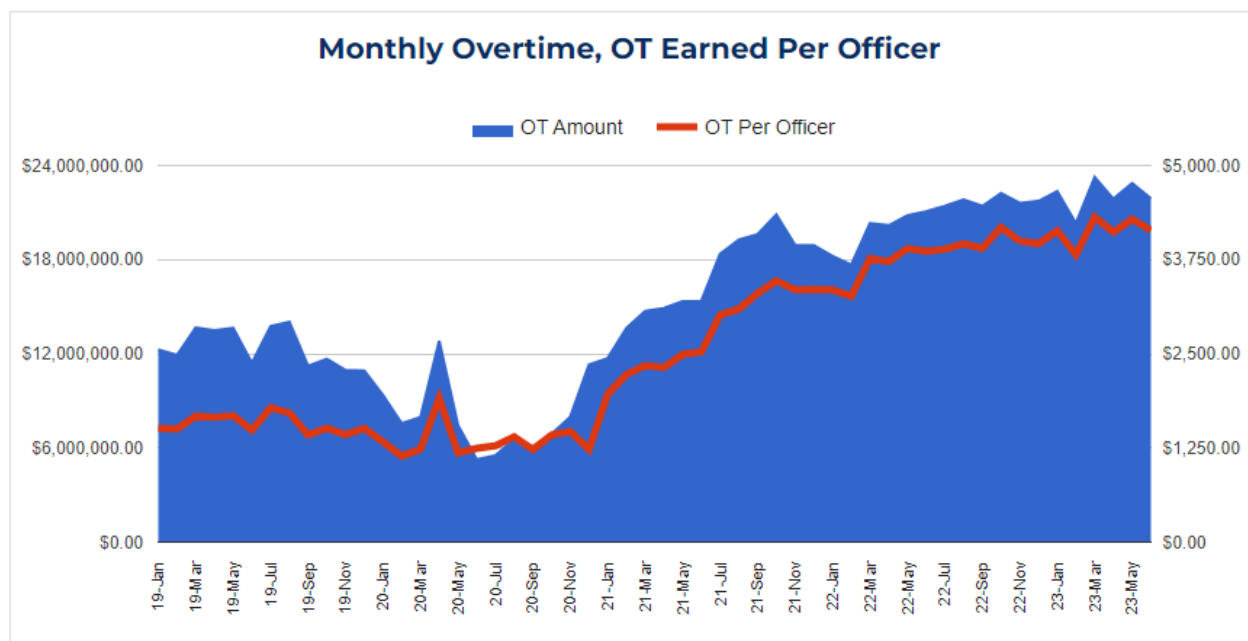
### Chart 3



Source: Comptroller’s Office analysis of data provided by the Department of Correction.

- In June 2023, uniformed staff used 83,560 total hours of sick leave: 10,104 hours (12.1%) for injuries, and 73,456 hours (87.9%) for illness. Both monthly injury and illness leave hours declined by 50% since August 2022.
- Monthly overtime earned per employee rose from ~\$1,500 pre-pandemic to ~\$4,200 in June 2023.

## Chart 4

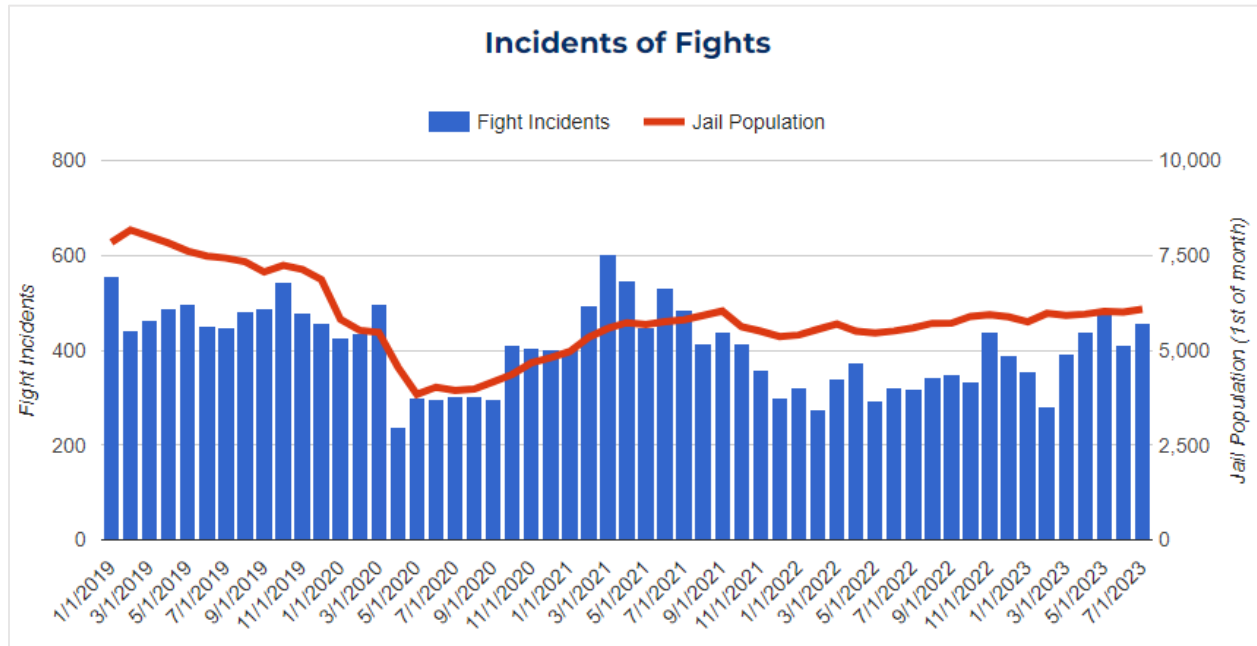


Source: Comptroller analysis of City payroll data

## Violence and Use of Force

- Incidents of fights rose sharply, increasing by 20% since last year, reaching a high of 479 in May 2023 up from 343 incidents in August 2022.
- Use of force incidents and allegations also remain high in recent months after falling in the months following the pandemic.
  - In final quarter of FY22 (April-June 2022) there were 1,798 use of force incidents and allegations, a rate of 32 per 100 Average Daily Population, declining to 1,654 in the third quarter of FY23.
  - The use of force rate per 100 Average Daily Population remains above 25 since the second quarter of FY21.
- The monthly number of assaults on staff trended downward from a peak in June 2021, decreasing 34% from 72 assaults in August 2022 to 46 in July 2023.
- The number of slashing and stabbings also peaked in 2021 and steadily declined from 40 incidents in August 2022 to 24 incidents in July 2023, though the number remains persistently higher since the pandemic's outset.

Chart 5



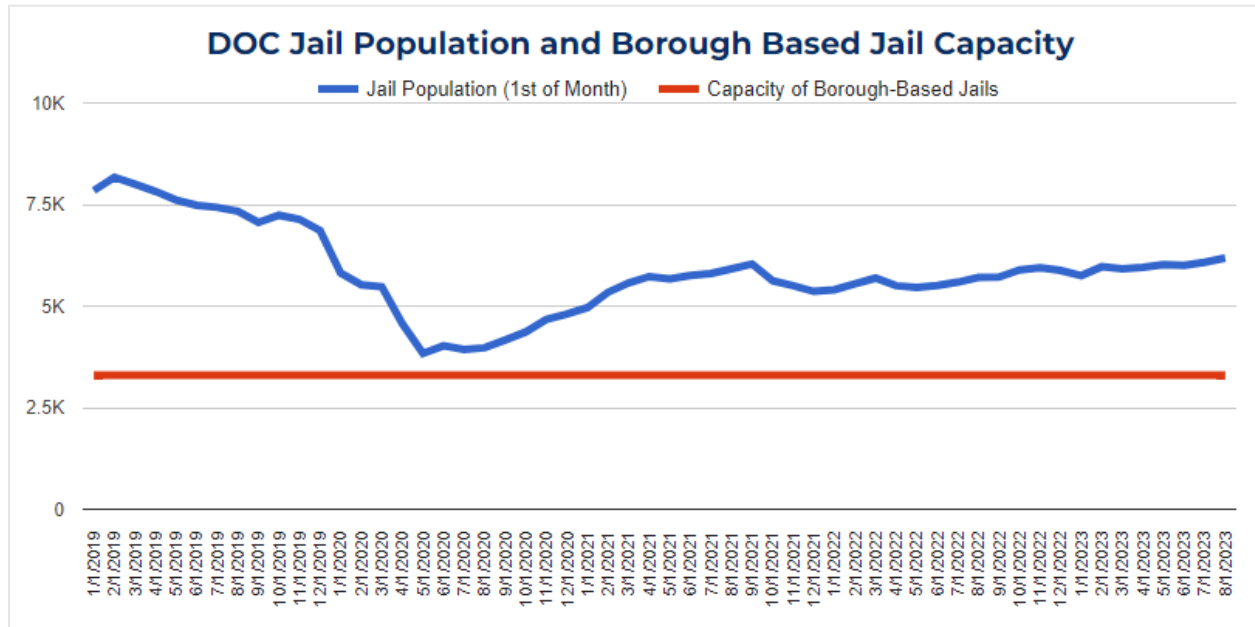
Source: New York City Comptroller’s Office analysis of Department of Correction data available on NYC Open Data, <https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Public-Safety/Inmate-Incidents-Inmate-Fights/k548-32d3>; and Vera Institute of Justice, Jail Viz 2.0, <https://greaterjusticenyc.vera.org/nycjail/>.

## Detailed Indicators: Progress Towards Closing Rikers

### Persons in Custody

- The number of people in custody steadily rose, reaching a total jail population of 6,182 on August 1, 2023, an increase of 474 individuals since August 1, 2022 when the jail population was 5,708.
- The planned capacity of the four borough-based jails, which are being constructed as part of the plan to close Rikers Island, is 3,300.
- The average length of stay of a person discharged decreased by 10 days, falling from 114 in August 2022, to 104 in June 2023.

## Chart 6



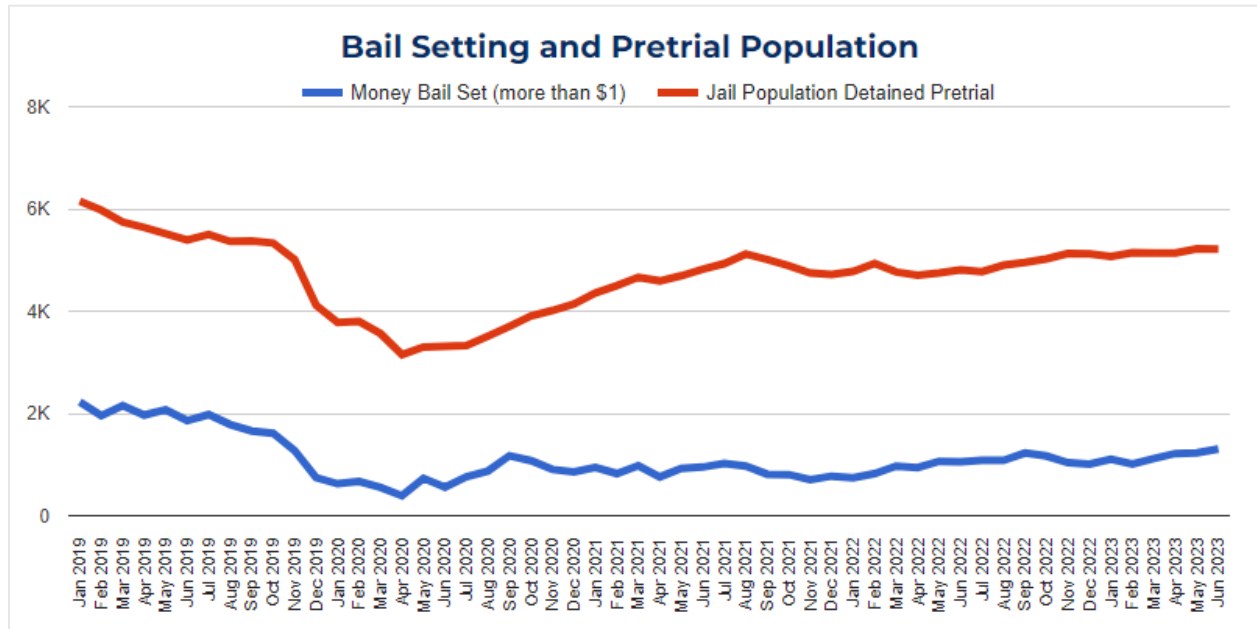
Source: Vera Institute of Justice, Jail Viz 2.0, <https://greaterjusticenyc.vera.org/nycjail/>.

## Pretrial Population

- There were 5,403 people detained pretrial in August 2023, 504 more than in August of 2022, representing a 10.2% increase.
- Judges set monetary bail for one-in-five people detailed pretrial in June 2023, the most recently available month.



## Chart 7



Source: Comptroller’s analysis of Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, Summary Data Files, Arraignments: <https://criminaljustice.cityofnewyork.us/system-data/>; Vera Institute of Justice, Jail Viz 2.0, <https://greaterjusticenyc.vera.org/nycjail/>.

## Conclusion

Staffing levels, violence, and other operational indicators of problems in jail management saw little improvement over the course of the past year under the Department of Correction’s management. The Comptroller’s Office will continue to publish available monthly metrics on jail conditions and operations to the dashboard and push to obtain additional data to provide greater oversight of city management of the jail system.