

# Official records confirm Rikers Island nursery little used

By Jie Jenny Zou

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The New York City Department of Correction has released data confirming that the Rikers Island jail nursery is little used and that upward of half of all applicants are denied entry.

The data, released more than four months after The New York World initially filed a records request, further confirm and update statistics obtained by the World through other sources.

In October, the World detailed the difficulties pregnant inmates face in gaining access to the two nursery programs operated in New York State, one of which is at Rikers.

The nursery program allows female inmates to stay with their newborns for several months after delivery. Studies have shown that participation in a nursery program can cut recidivism by as much as half.

The state has yet to provide any information as a result of a similar open records request filed over the summer regarding the nursery program at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for Women in Westchester County.

To learn more details about the issues facing the nursery programs, check out our [“Access Denied” series](#).

The new Rikers Island data show that as of November, only 11 of 19 applications to the program were ultimately approved in 2014.

As the World reported earlier, in 2013 only nine of 23 applicants were accepted.

The past two years represented a significant decline in the percentage of inmates who successfully applied to the program. Between 2010 and 2012, nearly 75 percent of applicants were approved.

Records also show a corresponding decline in participation at the nursery.

In 2005, an average of five mother-baby pairs were living in the nursery at any given time. And, as recently as 2012, the number remained as high as four. However, this year, the average has fallen to less than a single participant on any given day.

The length of stay for inmates accepted into the nursery has also dropped significantly from an average of more than 100 days in 2011 and 2012, to 50 days or less in the past two years.

Some of the decline in participation can be attributed to the declining female population at Rikers, which dropped from a 10-year high of 8,344 in 2007 to 6,122 in 2013, a 27 percent decline.

The World had also requested information detailing the time it takes to process applications, but a Department of Correction (DOC) official says that it does not maintain those records.

Delays in the application process were noted in a 2010 lawsuit filed by [Arisleida Duarte](#), a former inmate whose nursery application was rejected

In an interview with a New Work World reporter in September, Deputy DOC Commissioner Erik Berliner announced several reforms to the nursery program in an attempt to drive up usage, including allowing pregnant women to enter the program prior to giving birth and conducting a review of the application process.

Inmate advocate Jane Stanicki said access to the Rikers nursery appears to have improved within the past few months since the DOC implemented official changes and a new warden took over the Rose M. Singer women's facility on Rikers Island earlier this year.

"The last round of decisions we're aware of has been positive," said Stanicki, a board member of Hour Children, a nonprofit that provides support to families of incarcerated women. She said that all inmates who have applied since October have been approved.