

DNAinfo: State Reduces Number of Parolees at Controversial Gowanus Parole Center

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State Temporarily Reduces Number of Parolees at Controversial Gowanus Parole Center

GOWANUS — The controversial parole office opening soon in Gowanus will serve fewer parolees for the next two years under a legal settlement announced Wednesday.

Opponents of the parole office agreed to drop a lawsuit fighting the facility after the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision agreed that the parole center at 15 Second Ave. will temporarily serve just 2,000 ex-inmates instead of the 6,000 originally planned.

DOCCS announced the agreement in a joint statement with Gowanus United, the community group that fought the center and sued DOCCS in November 2014.

"We are beyond happy," said Kathryn Krase, a member of the Gowanus United executive committee and a plaintiff in the lawsuit. "When the community first banded together we were told this was a done deal, don't waste your time. We're really happy to know our efforts paid off."

The lower number of parolees will remain in effect for "a minimum of two years," according to DOCCS. At the end of two years, DOCCS and community leaders will "revisit" the issue of how many parolees use the facility, a DOCCS spokeswoman said.

The settlement also calls for regular meetings between DOCCS and community leaders, including the 78th Precinct, to discuss any problems related to the facility.

The Gowanus parole facility was supposed to consolidate three previous parole offices into a one-stop shop for all of Brooklyn's ex-prison inmates. But under the agreement, DOCCS will instead send some parolees to smaller satellite offices scattered throughout the borough. The locations for those offices haven't been announced yet, a DOCCS spokeswoman said.

"This program will establish DOCCS community reporting sites in neighborhoods throughout the borough, making it easier for parolees to meet the conditions of their parole," DOCCS officials said in a statement.

Despite the possibility of a two-year time limit on the reduction of parolees, Krase said she and other members of Gowanus United expect that DOCCS will stick with a decentralized approach to its parolee population.

“It’s not like after the two years is up they’re going to go to 6,000 [parolees],” Krase said. “It’s our understanding that decentralization is what they’re going to do in Brooklyn, and that as long as all goes well, it will stay that way.”

Krase added that DOCCS must give community members 90 days notice if the agency wants to increase the number of parolees by 500 or more, according to the settlement.

City Councilman Brad Lander called the agreement a "win-win" for the community, parolees and "better criminal justice policy."

"I'm confident that this model is going to work," Lander said. "It's a better approach. Once they have it set up with sites around the borough, we'll be able to make sure it continues after the two years."

Staff will arrive at the three-story parole facility later this month and parolees will start visiting the office by the end of March, a DOCCS spokeswoman said. Parolees will report there to meet with their parole officers, get tested for drug use and access services such as job placement and housing help.

Opponents fought the parole facility in part because they felt it was too close to schools and day care centers and too far from public transit.