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Contact:

Redmond Haskins
The Legal Aid Society
(929) 441-2384
rhaskins@legal-aid.org

*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

Legal Aid Society Calls on Board Of Correction To Address Plans To Protect Incarcerated New Yorkers From Potential COVID-19 Spread

(NEW YORK, NY) – **The Legal Aid Society** issued a [letter](#) today to the New York City Board of Correction (BOC) ahead of its meeting tomorrow on the City’s plans to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19 at local jails.

People confined in jails and prisons during outbreaks of infectious disease are particularly vulnerable not only because of the physical environment, including poor ventilation and close proximity, but also because of the profound constraints on self-help imposed by incarceration. Unlike people in free society, incarcerated people have no access to water or soap for hand washing, or capacity to seek physical distance, except with the overt assistance of their jailers.

New York City’s experiences during the 2009 H1N1 outbreak and earlier tuberculosis epidemics have taught our City important lessons about infectious disease. Incarcerated people and their families, representatives, and communities need to be informed of the City’s plans to protect them, their opportunities to protect themselves, and the changes in jail practices that they may expect.

The letter seeks clarity from the NYC Department of Correction (DOC) and Correctional Health Services (CHS) on a range of issues including:

Respiratory isolation bed availability and capacity

We request that DOC and CHS address:

- The number of respiratory isolation beds fully operational and unoccupied in DOC today.
- How quickly this capacity can be expanded, such as by making operational the former units.
- The capacity of CHS and DOC respectively, to staff a contagious disease unit with appropriately trained staff.
- The number at which CDU admissions would exceed current staffing capabilities, and the plan for care at that point.

Provision of water, soap and cleaning supplies

We ask CHS and DOC to describe their plan to:

- Ensure individuals have access to water as needed to clean hands.
- Provide soap to each individual.
- Provide individuals with disinfectant and materials to clean their living areas.

Worker protection

We would like to know:

- What physical protective gear will be provided to each incarcerated-worker.
- What options individuals have for refusing an assignment if they do not have adequate protection.
- What information has been given to incarcerated workers about their ability to protect themselves and others.

Continuing health care and essential services

We would like information about how DOC and CHS will:

- Ensure adherence to sick call procedures.
- Ensure that cell-bound individuals have access to staff to voice their needs.
- Ensure adequate assignment of and protection of escorts.

Information to incarcerated people

We ask DOC and CHS to ensure all incarcerated people and their families are given written information telling them:

- How they may seek health care, and what health care will be provided.
- How they may and should protect themselves (including how to get soap and water or disinfectant).

- What testing options are available to them.
- What rights they have to refrain from movement to potentially unsafe areas or under unsafe conditions (e.g., choosing not to leave a cell).
- How they will be informed by health authorities of their potential exposure (e.g., contacts with infected staff members, etc.).
- What changes they can expect in ordinary jail operations.

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The Legal Aid Society exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For over 140 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of our clients and helps improve our communities. <https://www.legalaidnyc.org>