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

***Legal Aid Statement On First Confirmed  
COVID-19 Case Among NYC Department Of  
Correction Staff***

**(NEW YORK, NY) – Tina Luongo, Attorney-in-Charge of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society,** released the following statement in response to the first confirmed COVID-19 case among New York City Department of Correction (DOC) staff:

“We expressed concerns about DOC’s preparedness for this pandemic because we all know that cases of COVID-19 in City jails are an inevitability. In light of this confirmed case, we implore the City to act immediately to protect all people in the facilities — both people in custody and staff. We await a response to our demands, which is more critical now than ever.”

**Background**

Earlier this week, The Legal Aid Society reported that it received complaints from multiple incarcerated clients concerning the lack of basic sanitation measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at local jails. Legal Aid memorialized these concerns in a [letter](#) sent to the New York City Department of Correction (DOC) and the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ), and also demanded answers to a range of outstanding COVID-19 related issues and DOC preparations.

Clients in several facilities in the borough jails and on Rikers Island reported that they do not have access to soap (or hand sanitizer, which is treated as contraband) in their housing units.

Some have been told by DOC officers that if they want soap, they must buy it from the commissary.

Clients also lack basic cleaning supplies necessary to disinfect the areas in which they live, and report that cleaning protocols identified by DOC for common spaces and showers were not being followed. Alarming, even the North Infirmary Command, which houses people with acute medical conditions, lacks sufficient cleaning supplies. Reports from just one day include:

- Person A said there is no soap or hand sanitizer available in his housing unit or in neighboring units. He is on the Inmate Council in his facility, and in that capacity spoke with captains about whether there were any DOC plans to acquire those items. They had no answer. He has serious underlying medical conditions.
- Person B said his unit was given industrial laundry soap for clothing, but told individuals would have to purchase bar soap from commissary to wash their hands and bodies.
- Person C is in a facility on Rikers Island that houses people who require more intensive medical care, and has a lifelong respiratory condition. He told us that DOC has not yet provided adequate cleaning supplies to his housing unit.
- Person D reported that officers have hand sanitizer in the “bubble,” but that it is not available to incarcerated people. He said that he and many others in his housing unit have no soap, because certain people are hoarding bars of soap. He said the common areas and showers are not being cleaned daily. He is immunocompromised.
- Person E said his unit has no cleaning supplies and has not been cleaned in several days. Officers told him that if he wanted disinfectant, he could buy it in commissary. Before arriving in that housing area, he lived for several days in the intake receiving room in his facility with dozens of other people. He said it was extremely dirty and was not cleaned at any time that he was there. He reported that several people in his unit have been coughing.

Legal Aid also demanded that DOC and MOCJ:

1. Provide free of charge all incarcerated people with soap and cleaning supplies needed to wash their hands frequently and clean their living areas.
2. Provide hand sanitizer in every housing unit for use by incarcerated people and staff;
3. Routinely audit the number of operational sinks and showers and availability of soap in every housing area, and fix any down units.
4. Make public a detailed plan for how DOC and CHS will identify and protect the most at-risk individuals in their care.

5. Provide us with City's plan for housing and treating symptomatic people in the very plausible event that the CDU is full.

6. Send CHS staff to every housing area to conduct health education in English, Spanish and other languages necessary.

Legal Aid set a deadline for Monday, March 16, 2020 for the City to reply.

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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>*