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

Legal Aid Calls on DOCCS to Release All New Yorkers Held at Rikers Island on a Parole Violation, Suspend all Parole Hearings Pending the Installation of Video Conferencing Technology

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society called on the New York State Department of Correction and Community Supervision (DOCCS) today to release all New Yorkers held at Rikers Island on a parole violation – many who are simply incarcerated because of a technical or non-violent offense – and to immediately suspend all parole hearings pending the installation of video conferencing technology; DOCCS currently only has one open video room.

“Our clients’ rights to due process includes the right to health and personal safety. Our attorneys and others who work in the system deserve the same. We demand the immediate release of all New Yorkers held on parole violations at Rikers Island and that DOCCS suspend all hearings at once to install video conferencing technology. Until this is done, people’s lives will continue to be at risk,” **Lorraine Mc Evilly, Director of the Parole Revocation Defense Unit at The Legal Aid Society.**

Just Monday, this reasonable request was denied by DOCCS, the New York City Department of Correction (DOC), and the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ).

See excerpts of correspondence The Legal Aid Society communicated to DOCCS earlier this week highlighting three areas of concern:

- The revocation process will likely fuel the spread of the Coronavirus as DOCCS continues to lock up vulnerable people from the community. Since many people supervised by DOCCS are homeless, on the street or in shelters, and often suffer from medical and mental health conditions, the people coming in on DOCCS' warrants often have high levels of contact with the public and in medical care settings. DOCCS' parole officers have contact with those same populations and environments before going from jail to jail serving documents on people accused of violating parole and interrogating them. So those parole officers are poised to help transmit the virus throughout the Rikers systems.

- The Donald Cranston Judicial Center (DCJC) is a perfect hub to spread the virus to every jail, as Rikers prisoners are brought to Rikers Island Judicial Center (RIJC), placed in a small area of "holding pens," and brought to court together in close quarters. LAS Parole Revocation Defense Unit (PRDU) attorneys, DOCCS and DOC staff are then at extraordinary risk of contracting and spreading the virus to offices and the broader community. The small hearing rooms and tables make it impossible to accomplish the 3-6 feet needed for social distancing. In addition, the location of the center on the island makes traveling there very difficult and extremely risky because many of our attorneys do not have personal vehicles, and the public is now being advised not to use mass transit.

- LAS PRDU attorneys spend extraordinary amounts of time in direct contact with not just our clients at RIJC but also with DOC officers who go in and out of many other jails and have significant contact with people imprisoned on Rikers. Given PRDU's attorneys substantial caseload, most of the attorneys spend at least four full work days, or around 30-plus hours per week inside RIJC. Between us, our clients, DOC and DOCCS staff, RIJC is the antithesis of social distancing. Our unit is at particular high risk to contract and spread this virus. As an example, this past [Friday, March 13, 2020](#), a PRDU client had a protracted coughing fit. Due to DOC's insistence that all accused persons be handcuffed during parole revocation hearings at the center, the client's hands were bound behind his back and he was unable to protect others from potential virus spread by covering his mouth with his elbow or sleeve, putting all in the room at risk of transmission.

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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>