



March 20, 2020

CONTACTS:

Alejandra Lopez, The Legal Aid Society, 917-294-9348, AILopez@legal-aid.org

Ryan Karerat, The Bronx Defenders, 917-635-4326, rkarerat@bronxdefenders.org

Dan Ball, Brooklyn Defender Services, 203-213-9303, dball@bds.org

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

NYIFUP Reports Immigrants Organize Second Hunger Strike in NJ Detention Center In Protest of Egregious Conditions Amid COVID-19 Pandemic

*As Immigrants Strike in Hudson County Correctional Facility,
NYC Public Defenders Renew Call for ICE to Release All
Immigrants in Detention and Halt Arrests*

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society, Brooklyn Defender Services, and The Bronx Defenders – New York City’s defender organizations providing free legal representation to detained immigrants through the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) – today released the following statement after learning directly from incarcerated immigrants who have organized a hunger strike at Hudson County Correctional Facility as of Friday, March 20. This is the second hunger strike to be organized this week, after incarcerated immigrants launched an ongoing strike at Essex County Correctional Facility on Tuesday, March 17. These hunger strikes are a direct response to egregious conditions and inaction by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in New York City-area detention facilities.

“As every hour passes, ICE’s continued inaction and complete disregard for human life brings us closer to a massive public health crisis. With confirmed reports that an ICE staff member in Elizabeth Detention Center and a staff member in the Bergen County Jail in New Jersey have tested positive for coronavirus, it grows clearer that it is only a matter of when, not if, an outbreak of COVID-19 will ravage immigrant detention facilities.

We have received information from multiple clients that the conditions at the Hudson County Correctional Facility are so dire that people incarcerated there have launched a hunger strike, joining immigrants at Essex County Correctional Facility who organized a strike on March 17th. At least 50 people in multiple housing units have organized to protest the conditions of their confinement in the face of retaliation from correctional officers, demanding their immediate release on bond or supervised release. Among reports of egregious conditions, we have heard that ICE is not responding to medical sick calls and that there are sick people in units who are not being treated or tested. Due to ongoing ICE enforcement, we have also received reports that ICE continues to bring new people into the Hudson County Correctional Facility, further exposing hundreds of people to a heightened risk of COVID-19.

We stand in solidarity with those striking and renew our call for ICE to commit to releasing all people in their custody immediately and halt all further enforcement.”

On March 20, 2020, we received the following statement from people incarcerated at the Hudson County Correctional Facility:

1. On Monday they moved us to a new cell block and since then from 6pm-10am they don't let us out of our cells. Too many hours locked up in the same cell.
2. In the same cell is the toilet and you have to eat in the same place. With two people to a cell, when the other person is using the bathroom you have to smell them. It's disgusting.
3. The water in the toilets shuts off every half hour, after two flushes the toilet blocks off more water so that we don't use too much water.
4. The air conditioning is too cold. There are people here with medical problems that have been affected by the cold. There are people with diabetes. The cold causes inflammation in the feet. We cannot sleep because of the cold.
5. We are depressed and anxious due to too much time locked in our cells.

6. The hygiene is extremely dirty. There is no control. If you could see how we live you would be disgusted. The showers are so dirty it makes you not want to wash.
7. The showers are dirty and the water comes out boiling hot. If you wanted to make an instant soup you could make it with this water. Since the water is so hot in the showers, the paint is peeling off the walls. There is a lot of black mold. There are no shower curtains. Imagine bathing and seeing everyone else's backsides. One bathes with shame.
8. Inside the cells it's too cold. It's so cold we can use our sinks as refrigerators for our cartons of milk.
9. Each cell does not have enough materials to disinfect. There is bacteria everywhere. The lieutenant has told us they have a federal order to keep everyone locked up like this, but they haven't shown us the order so we cannot verify that.
10. On Monday when they moved us to the new cell block the beds were missing mattresses. We slept on the hard metal of the bed for 3 days until they brought mattresses. Now the mattresses they brought are very hard, and they are giving people body pain.
11. Ever since one person on our old block had symptoms, the medical staff refuses to see us because they are afraid of infecting themselves with the virus. Even those of us with diabetes, they are not calling us to take our insulin. We make requests but they do not respond. They haven't given us nail clippers to cut our nails.
12. We try to speak to the correctional officers with friendly words. They treat us like we are animals. They refuse to give us enough toilet paper.
13. We have to endure their rules. They tell us we are in prison, we are criminal prisoners, but we all know that we have already served our time through the criminal court, and now we are only detained in an immigration detention center.

###

The New York Family Immigrant Unity Project ([NYIFUP](#)) is the nation's first public defender system for immigrants facing deportation—defined as those in removal proceedings before an immigration judge. Funded by the New York City Council since July 2014, the program provides a free attorney to almost all detained indigent immigrants facing deportation at Varick Street Immigration.