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

Legal Aid, Bronx Defenders Request Temporary Restraining Order to Immediately Free Clients at High Risk of COVID-19 from Local Immigration Detention Centers

(NEW YORK, NY) – **The Legal Aid Society** and **The Bronx Defenders** today filed an application in federal court for a [temporary restraining order](#) (TRO) in *Coronel et. al. v. Decker et. al.*, litigation filed this past Friday on behalf of seven individuals in immigration detention who are at imminent risk of serious illness or death because of their underlying health conditions in the event of a COVID-19 infection.

As of Sunday, March 22, Hudson County Correctional Facility was placed in lockdown after [two county inmates tested positive for COVID-19](#). Two plaintiffs in this lawsuit are currently in ICE custody at the Hudson jail. A Sheriff's Deputy at Bergen County Jail also tested positive for COVID-19 on Thursday, while reports are quickly emerging of several incarcerated immigrants being quarantined within the facility due to suspected additional cases. Three plaintiffs in this lawsuit are currently in ICE custody at the Bergen jail.

Last Tuesday, immigrants detained at Essex County Correctional Facility [began](#) a hunger strike over deplorable conditions and fear that the facility was not doing enough to protect those in custody against COVID-19. Immigrants detained at Hudson County jail followed Wednesday with their own strike for similar reasons.

“The situation our clients face has reached a breaking point in this crisis, as they remain trapped within facilities where the COVID-19 virus has officially entered and is likely to spread rapidly,” said **Aadhithi Padmanabhan, Staff Attorney in the Immigration Law Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. “Jurisdictions across the country have begun to release individuals at high risk for COVID-19 infection and complications, and ICE must do the same. The time for decisive action is now.”

“Rather than alleviating the growing public health crisis, ICE has opted to recklessly endanger our clients as the risk of COVID-19 spread in their jails continues to grow,” said **Suchita Mathur, Federal Practice Attorney on The Bronx Defenders’ immigration team**. “Every day ICE’s failure to act in a reasonable manner, as recommended by public health experts around the world, brings us closer and closer to disaster. The only way to protect our clients, all immigrants in detention, and our communities is to release them back to their families. We’re asking the court to intervene before it’s too late.”

Demonstrating the rapid pace at which the virus spreads within carceral settings, in New York City, 38 individuals within jails system – 21 incarcerated New Yorkers and 17 City employees – have tested positive for COVID-19 within a span of just 6 days, with another 58 individuals currently being monitored in contagious disease and quarantine units. In response to cries from advocates and family members to release incarcerated individuals particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, Mayor Bill de Blasio [announced](#) that the City had released 23 individuals and officials were considering the release of 200 more.

Background on *Coronel et. al. v. Decker et. al.*:

The [complaint](#), filed in the Southern District of New York, seeks the immediate release of seven plaintiffs detained by ICE in jails around New York City on the grounds that continuing to incarcerate them constitutes deliberate indifference to the risk of serious medical harm in violation of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution. Among the plaintiffs are individuals who suffer from diabetes, heart disease, neurocognitive disorder, kidney disease, and lung and liver problems--all groups of people that the CDC has identified as being at particularly high risk of COVID-19 infection.

The organizations have previously provided information about these especially vulnerable clients to ICE and the US Attorney’s office for the Southern District of New York and requested consideration for humanitarian release, but ICE has failed to demonstrate timely consideration of these requests, and has failed to take action to protect those in its custody, necessitating this urgent request for judicial intervention.

The filing can be found [here](#).

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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>

The Bronx Defenders is a public defender nonprofit that is radically transforming how low-income people in the Bronx are represented in the justice system and in doing so, is transforming the system itself. We have pioneered a ground-breaking, nationally recognized model of defense called holistic defense that achieves better outcomes for our clients. Each year, we defend 27,000 low-income Bronx residents in criminal, civil, child welfare, and immigration cases, and we reach thousands more through our community intake and outreach programs. Learn more at www.bronxdefenders.org