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

NYIFUP Statement on First Immigrant Detainee Testing Positive For COVID-19 at Bergen County Jail

*NYC Public Defenders Demand ICE Release All Immigrants
From Detention*

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society, Brooklyn Defender Services, and The Bronx Defenders – New York City’s defender organizations providing free legal in representation to detained immigrants through the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) – today released the following statement in response to news of the first ICE detainee testing positive for COVID-19 at Bergen County Jail:

“ICE’s continued inaction made today’s confirmed COVID-19 case in ICE detention a virtual inevitability and further highlights the urgent need to release all individuals in ICE custody immediately. For weeks, we have received many disturbing reports from our detained clients about the unsanitary conditions that are putting their lives at risk. We have reported several hunger strikes by currently incarcerated people at ICE facilities in New Jersey due to ICE medical mistreatment and abuse. ICE has refused to heed our demands, and their lack of

transparency and outright denial – despite mounting reports of mass quarantines throughout the facilities – is nothing short of criminal. Each day, ICE’s continued negligence and inaction brings us closer and closer to disaster. We are deeply concerned for our clients -- New Yorkers, family members, community members, people who need to be released immediately to their families -- as the threat of a wide-scale outbreak of COVID-19 within immigrant detention facilities grows.

ICE has the unique opportunity now to prevent this crisis from spiraling. If ICE wants to act in the public interest and safety, they must commit to stopping all further enforcement and releasing all people in their custody immediately. We need New Jersey and New York federal legislators, Governor Phil Murphy, Governor Andrew Cuomo, and local government officials to demand that ICE release people from their facilities located in the epicenter of this pandemic, specifically Bergen County Jail, Essex County Correctional Facility, Hudson County Correctional Center, Elizabeth Detention Center, and Orange County Jail. We are deeply concerned that any further inaction by government officials will lead to the death of one or more of our many clients living in terror in these facilities.”

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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.