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

Legal Aid Files Lawsuit to Release Incarcerated Young New Yorkers at a high risk of COVID-19 from area Detention Centers

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society filed a [lawsuit](#) in New York State Supreme Court, New York County today on behalf of at least 10 young New Yorkers currently detained in secure and non-secure juvenile detention centers. By physical design, these facilities house youth in close congregate settings, with shared dining rooms, common recreational areas, communal bathrooms and showers, and, at some sites, shared bedrooms. In light of the extraordinarily dangerous nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, with its extremely high degree of contagion and its transmission rate in New York City growing at an alarming pace, these youth are extremely vulnerable to infection by the virus and to its potentially devastating consequences. In addition, all family visitation has been suspended indefinitely, isolating these youth during this stressful time.

This lawsuit seeks the immediate release from detention of all youth charged as juvenile delinquents on the grounds that continuing to hold them in these facilities constitutes deliberate indifference to the risk of serious medical harm in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment and state constitutional right to due process. The only youth excluded from the lawsuit are those who have a hold from an entity other than Family Court or for whom release would incur potential negative consequences.

Today's filing is one in a series of lawsuits public defenders have brought for vulnerable clients over the last couple of days.

"COVID-19 has already been confirmed in these facilities with three ACS employees testing positive for the virus late last week. Because jails, prisons, and other detention centers are not designed to manage infectious disease, we anticipate COVID-19 to spread rapidly and infect many more individuals in the coming days," said **Dawne Mitchell, Attorney-in-Charge of the Juvenile Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. "Our young clients are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, and can safely be managed at home with their families. We call on the City to grant their immediate release back to their families and communities."

This past Friday, three staffers employed by the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and stationed at juvenile detention centers across the city [tested positive for COVID-19](#).

Demonstrating the rapid pace at which the virus spreads within carceral settings, at [local jails](#), 112 individuals – 75 incarcerated New Yorkers and 37 City employees – have tested positive for COVID-19 as of March 25, 2020.

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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>