



March 26, 2020

Contact:

Redmond Haskins
The Legal Aid Society
929-441-2384
rhaskins@legal-aid.org

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

Legal Aid Wins Release of 16 Incarcerated New Yorkers at a high risk of COVID-19 from City Jails

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society, through [litigation](#) brought earlier this week, secured the release of 16 incarcerated New Yorkers especially vulnerable to COVID-19 from pretrial detention or on a parole violation hold at Rikers Island. These individuals, by virtue of their age and/or underlying medical condition, are particularly vulnerable to serious illness or death if infected by COVID-19, and jail conditions make it impossible to protect them.

New York State Supreme Court Justice Mark Dwyer found that Legal Aid made the necessary initial showing establishing a Constitutional violation. Justice Dwyer also stated that the City and the State had so far failed to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 at local jails and that further action was necessary. Justice Dwyer gave the Legal Aid Society leave to renew applications for release on an additional nine (9) individuals, suggesting that he may release these additional people if Legal Aid provides further information to the court tomorrow.

“This ruling is a substantial step forward towards getting our clients off Rikers Island, out of harm’s way, and back home with their families,” said **Corey Stoughton, Attorney-in-Charge of the Special Litigation Unit with the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. “New York City’s jails have now emerged as the epicenter in the United States for COVID-19 with an infection rate seven times higher than that of the rest of the city, higher than New York State and higher than the rest of the country writ large. It’s unconscionable that those in power continue to ignore this reality. We will not quit until all of our clients are safely released from custody.”

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.

On Thursday, The Legal Aid Society released an analysis revealing that Rikers Island and other local jails lead the nation in terms of COVID-19 infection rates. The current infection rate at local jails is 14.51 per 1,000 people, more than 7 times higher than New York City and 87 times higher than the United States at large. If the daily COVID-19 infection rate remains this high, the virus will engulf the entire local jail population in a matter of weeks.

###

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>