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

Statement on Michael Tyson, LAS Client who Died from COVID-19 While in Custody on a Technical Parole Violation

(NEW YORK, NY) – Tina Luongo, Attorney-in-Charge of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society, released the following statement regarding Michael Tyson, a client who died yesterday from COVID-19 while in custody on a technical parole violation:

"We are both heartbroken and outraged to learn that our client, Michael Tyson, who was held on Rikers Island for a technical parole violation, has passed away from COVID-19. This tragedy would have been entirely avoidable if only Governor Cuomo had directed DOCCS to act decisively from the outset of this epidemic to release incarcerated New Yorkers who, like Mr. Tyson, were especially vulnerable to the virus.

Albany's inaction has already cost lives; and, as the virus reaches its apex, many more will succumb unless the Governor and DOCCS act immediately to address the humanitarian crisis in our jails and prisons. Governor Cuomo has the authority to grant clemency and exercise other forms of executive authority to release our vulnerable clients and other incarcerated New Yorkers now. It is time for the Governor to employ the full breadth of those powers and to act without delay to avoid further catastrophe. DOCCS' myopic over-reliance on re-incarceration, wholly unjustifiable at any time, is utterly disastrous in the era of COVID-19."

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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.

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