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

## ***Legal Aid Condemns DOC Staff For Failing To Wear Masks, Practice Social Distancing***

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society, in a recently issued [letter](#), condemned the New York City Department of Correction (DOC) for the widespread failure among staff to wear masks and practice social distancing. In recent weeks, Legal Aid Attorneys who have participated in videoconferences and in-person legal visits to DOC facilities describe a persistent failure of DOC staff to wear masks and follow COVID-19 protocols. Legal Aid staff reports that this problem extends across multiple facilities in the borough jails and on Rikers Island, and that it has occurred for months.

Some reports from just the past four weeks include:

- Early August, VCBC: during a videoconference, the attorney could see multiple staff members in the background, and none were wearing masks.
- Mid-August, MDC: an attorney attempted to visit a client in person. The officer working the security checkpoint, who has contact with all persons wishing to enter the facility, wore his mask under his chin with his nose and mouth fully exposed. In a ten minute period, the attorney witnessed three additional officers come through security—two wearing masks under their chins with their noses and mouths fully exposed, and one wearing no mask at all. The attorney felt unsafe and left.
- Mid-August, RNDC: during her entire visit to Rikers Island, the attorney saw only two officers wearing their masks properly—the desk officer at the entrance to RNDC on her way in, and the bus driver for the trip to the facility. Every other officer she saw was not wearing their mask properly, if at all, including the two desk officers at the Samuel Perry Reception building, the officer who collected her visitor pass on her way out, the RNDC desk officer on the way out, and at least five officers with whom she rode the bus to RNDC. The attorney reported that she was on Rikers Island for hours, and saw no cleaning or sanitation take place.

- Mid-August, AMKC: during a videoconference, the attorney saw an officer open the door to the booth where her client was sitting—a small, confined space—with the officer’s mask below her nose and mouth.
- In one report from early September, an attorney visited a client in GRVC. The letter sent to the Department details failure after failure to wear masks and socially distance, but one particularly telling moment stands out: when the attorney watched two uniformed officers go from bus to bus ensuring that "masks required" signs were posted as they themselves were not wearing masks.

"Public health authorities are clear that we must remain vigilant, because the danger of this virus is not behind us. The City’s failure to ensure that its employees abide by basic protocols such as the requirement to wear masks causes us grave concern about whether DOC is implementing all COVID-19 protocols with fidelity,” said **Tina Luongo, Attorney-in-Charge of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. “We continue to urge state and local authorities to release our vulnerable clients. But if they must remain in these inherently dangerous custodial environments, the City must take basic and humane steps to prevent suffering and loss of life.”

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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. [www.legalaidnyc.org](http://www.legalaidnyc.org)*