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

***Amid a Second COVID-19 Outbreak at Local Jails, Legal Aid  
Calls on State, City and DAs to Release Vulnerable New  
Yorkers Immediately***

***New Data Reports 31 new COVID-19 Infections Among DOC  
Staff in a Single Week, 18 Active Cases Among Those in  
Custody***

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society called on Governor Andrew Cuomo, Mayor Bill de Blasio, local District Attorney’s offices, correction departments and other relevant government agencies to [prioritize the immediate release of New Yorkers especially vulnerable to COVID-19](#) from local jails amid reports of new data that strongly suggests significant in-jail transmission. An analysis by Legal Aid of City COVID-19 reports found that:

- For months, there have been one or two seemingly isolated reported infections among DOC and CHS staff each week. The [new BOC report](#) reveals 31 new staff infections in one week.
- On November 7, there were only seven housing areas with COVID-19 designations in which 96 people were housed. By November 27, there were 33 COVID-designated units housing 759 people.

- In just one week, the number of people in exposed housing units more than tripled. The problem has reached nearly all facilities: where previously, the only facilities with COVID-19 designated housing units were MDC, AMKC, and WF, there are now exposures or active infections in MDC, AMKC, VCBC, GRVC, OBCC, RNDC, and WF.
- CHS reporting shows that reported active infections among people in custody increased exponentially in the last two weeks, from 2 active infections on November 17, to 18 on November 29.

Steadily adding more fuel to the tinderbox, the population in the jails has risen rapidly in recent months and is now comparable to pre-pandemic levels. As of November 27, the total population in DOC was 4,805 people — the same population as in late March, which the City acknowledged was too dangerous and necessitated decarceration. [And DOC has created perilously high density levels](#) in the housing areas, in flagrant violation of public health standards: 66% of dorm units and 60% of cell units remain above 50% of capacity, and 35% of units exceed 75% of capacity. Of the ten facilities in operation as of November 27, seven of them have units at or above 90% capacity, with units at six facilities at 100% of capacity. Operating facilities in this manner as an outbreak surges within the jails and the broader community is unacceptably dangerous.

Legal Aid memorialized this data in a [letter](#) sent today to BOC, urging the Board to immediately schedule a special public hearing in this month to address the COVID-19 outbreak in the city jails. Legal Aid requested that the hearing encompass every important issue affecting the people who work and are detained in the jails, including: decarceration efforts, density of housing areas, the lack of routine, mass testing for staff and people in custody, patient and staff education, availability of PPE and medical care, and plans for vaccine distribution.

“COVID-19 is surging at local jails, and the Department of Correction has proven that it is simply unable to mitigate the spread of the virus and protect incarcerated New Yorkers, and people in the jails should not pay the price for these failures,” said **Tina Luongo, Attorney-in-Charge of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. “We need Governor Cuomo, Mayor de Blasio, local District Attorneys, correction departments and other relevant actors to prioritize the immediate release of our vulnerable clients. Lives hang in the balance. Failing to swiftly and meaningfully act will perpetuate the spread of the virus to a point where it will be impossible to contain.”

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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)