



BROOKLYN
DEFENDER
SERVICES



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

NYIFUP Statement on Egregious Treatment of Immigrants on Hunger Strike in ICE Detention

Attorneys Demand Transparency from Jail Officials and Release of All Immigrants in ICE Custody

(New York, NY) – **The Legal Aid Society, Brooklyn Defender Services, and The Bronx Defenders** – New York City’s defender organizations providing free legal representation to detained immigrants through the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) – today released the below statement in response to mounting reports that ICE and jail officials have retaliated against incarcerated people participating in a hunger strike at Hudson County Jail.

At least three ICE detainees have been placed in solitary confinement and denied water and other basic necessities for over 24 hours, forced to sleep in cold temperatures without blankets, and had all their personal belongings confiscated without explanation. NYIFUP attorneys report that they have been unable to reach their clients and that their appointments were cancelled with no prior notice. Additionally, it is reported that some 50 incarcerated immigrants are being transferred to another facility, possibly in an effort to curtail the strike.

According to one detainee, “The treatment we are receiving here is inhumane. We are being treated worse than rats. I am suffering. No one should have to suffer this treatment.”

NYIFUP released the following statement:

“This egregious treatment of our clients in ICE detention is absolutely unacceptable and marks a violent and inhumane form of retaliation by jail officials. Our clients have the right to protest the poor and life-threatening conditions in which they are being held, which range from inadequate medical care, poor sanitation, broken phone and video equipment that prevents communication with families and attorneys, to widespread solitary confinement. The ongoing hunger strikes are yet another urgent call to action by detained people taking enormous personal risks to demand justice and safety. The daily accounts we hear from the people we serve -- current and former participants in the strike -- are horrific, appalling, and an indictment of ICE and jail staff’s deliberate disregard for human life, and we are united with them in their fight.

With COVID surging again in New York, New Jersey, and across the country, releasing all people from immigration detention has never been more urgent. We call on ICE to respect detained individuals’ right to protest, to not retaliate against them, and to instead protect public health and human rights by releasing people immediately.”

BACKGROUND: The New York Family Immigrant Unity Project (NYIFUP) is the nation’s first public defender system for immigrants facing deportation—defined as those in removal proceedings before an immigration judge. Funded by the New York City Council since July 2014, the program provides a free attorney to almost all detained indigent immigrants facing deportation at the Varick Street Immigration Court in New York City.

There is currently [a COVID-19 outbreak](#) in the Hudson County jail, which officials believe can be traced to a staff person.

Public health experts have [called for decarceration](#) as a life-saving tool in the fight against COVID-19.

Immigration detention facilities have relied on widespread solitary confinement amid this pandemic, which [only exacerbates the harm](#) and spread of the virus.