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

Governor Cuomo Refuses To Permit Vaccinations at Prisons, Local Jails Even as COVID-19 Claims More Lives of People in Custody

28 New Yorkers in State Prison Have Died of COVID-19 Since March, Almost 4,000 Have Contracted the Virus

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society called on Governor Andrew Cuomo to reverse his dangerous policy of excluding people in New York State prisons and local jails from receiving the COVID-19 vaccine along with other Phase 1B populations.

As a result of this exclusion, DOCCS cannot vaccinate people in state prisons and the City cannot yet roll out the vaccine on Rikers Island and other local facilities. This cynical political move comes as new data released today show that [3,804 people in New York state prisons have contracted COVID-19 since March, and 28 people have succumbed to the virus.](#)

New York City jails remain perilously overcrowded. As of the most recent New York City Board of Correction [report](#) with data up to January 1, 2021, 70 percent of the City jail population was in a housing unit that was more than 50 percent full. Equally alarming, the City's dorm units, which house 1,606 new Yorkers – over a third of the entire jail population – are currently placed in dorms that are more than 50 percent full. 665 New Yorkers, or 14 percent of the entire population, was placed in a dorm unit that was more than 75 percent full. The import is, particularly in dorm units, is that a significant portion of people in City jails are being housed in a way that means they physically cannot follow Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines to practice social distancing.

In a hearing today before the New York City Council Committees on Health and Hospitals on the COVID-19 vaccine, public health officials sounded the alarm about the need for swift action delivering the vaccine. Yet their hands are tied by Governor Cuomo's policy limiting the vaccine only to fractional subgroups of the incarcerated population, such as elderly people.

Legal Aid also reaffirmed the need for Albany to decarcerate prisons immediately by releasing medically vulnerable individuals to protect them from infection. Legal Aid has long called on officials - including the Governor, Mayor Bill de Blasio, New York City's five District Attorneys, and others - to facilitate the release of New Yorkers incarcerated at City jails.

“Governor Cuomo’s refusal to authorize vaccination of New Yorkers who live in the congregate settings of prisons and jails extends racist policies of incarceration to racist policies of vaccination. It defies the advice of all public health experts, and is cruel and irresponsible,” said **Stefen Short, Supervising Attorney with the Prisoners’ Rights Project at The Legal Aid Society**. “We demand that the Governor reverse his policy to ensure that our vulnerable clients receive the vaccine immediately.”

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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