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Contact:

Redmond Haskins
The Legal Aid Society
929-441-2384
rhaskins@legal-aid.org

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

Over 4,000 New Yorkers in DOCCS' Custody Have Now Tested Positive for COVID-19 Since Pandemic Began Last March

Cuomo Must Join Other States and Allow Vaccinations of People Incarcerated In Prisons and Jails

(New York, NY) – The Legal Aid Society called on Governor Andrew Cuomo to allow state and local health authorities to provide COVID-19 vaccines to people held in jails and prisons as [data](#) released today by the New York State Department of Correction and Community Supervision (DOCCS) show that 4,087 people in state custody have now tested positive for COVID-19 since the pandemic began in March of last year.

Recognizing the heightened risk to COVID-19 incarcerated people face as a result of being forced to live in congregate settings, [Massachusetts](#), under Republican Governor Charlie Baker, announced last month that his administration would immediately offer the vaccine to tens of thousands of people in state custody. Virginia also recently [announced](#) a similar effort.

While governors in other states take decisive action, Governor Cuomo has ignored the appeals of health experts, who agree that prisons and jails are high risk settings that should be prioritized for vaccine access, and Cuomo has not authorized the vaccine for these populations as part of Phase 1b.

“This is racism, cynically and cruelly disregarding the lives of the Black and Latinx people who comprise the incarcerated population and their families,” said **Mary Lynne Werlwas, Director of the Prisoners’ Rights Project at The Legal Aid Society**. “Governor Cuomo must end this perverse policy, which contradicts all public health guidance and allows the virus to spread within and out from the facilities, and immediately allow medical staff to provide the vaccine to our clients in jails and prisons.”

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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