



BROOKLYN
DEFENDER
SERVICES



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

NYIFUP Condemns ICE for Heat Outage at Bergen County Jail on Coldest Day in Tri-State in Two Years

(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 sent a [letter](#) to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) concerning several alarming reports that there is no heat in various detainee cellblocks at Bergen County Jail. The heat outage--on the coldest day in the Tri-State area in two years--has reportedly lasted over 36 hours.

One detainee said he was told by jail staff that "the cold will kill the coronavirus, so we're not turning it on." The letter further states:

“There are high levels of community spread in the NY/NJ area, and detainees are vulnerable to infection, serious illness and death if exposed [to COVID-19]. Given that this is a public health emergency for our clients, we ask that you immediately direct the release of ICE detainees from Bergen.

Moreover, this lack of heat is especially concerning considering the extremely low temperatures currently affecting Bergen County, New Jersey, thereby placing our clients at severe risk.”

NYIFUP attorneys are demanding that ICE release all incarcerated individuals 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.