



April 2, 2021

Contact:

Alejandra Lopez
The Legal Aid Society
ALopez@legal-aid.org
917-294-9348

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

Legal Aid and 35+ Organizations Call for Greater Access to Voter Registration in NYC Jails

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society, along with over 35 organizations, called on New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, Deputy Mayor Phil Thompson, New York City Board of Correction (BOC) Executive Director Margaret Egan, New York State New Board of Elections (BOE) Commissioner Andrew Spano, and New York City Department of Correction (DOC) Commissioner Cynthia Brann, to ensure greater access to voter registration in local jails.

In the [letter](#), criminal justice advocates state their serious concerns with existing policies and practices on access to voting in New York City jails, particularly as the upcoming Mayoral primary election on June 22, 2021 quickly approaches. Advocates outline specific steps that should be taken by the City to ensure that eligible voters in City jails have prompt and secure ballot access without being hindered, including setting up and announcing poll sites, hiring outside volunteers to provide voter education and assist people with filling out voting forms, and ensuring that absentee ballots are delivered to the BOE, among others.

The [letter](#) states:

New York State's history of enforcing Jim Crow laws to prevent Black citizens from voting remains in effect for people in its jails, the overwhelming majority who are people of color. Providing voting access and education to eligible voters who are in custody is a national priority of President Biden's administration as demonstrated in his recently passed executive order. New York City must also lead by ensuring that all eligible voters detained in its jails are not stripped of the sacred right to vote.

Individuals in NYC jails are required to vote by absentee ballot, and must rely entirely on DOC staff to exercise their right to vote. DOC is required to assist individuals with voting. Advocates flagged that for the upcoming election, the last day to postmark an application for an absentee ballot is June 15th and the last day to postmark an absentee ballot is June 22nd—which means eligible voters admitted into DOC custody after June 15th and held through June 22nd won't be able to vote.

Moreover, recent reports by Legal Aid's incarcerated clients confirm that DOC was not meeting its obligations to facilitate access to voting in NYC jails. The overwhelming majority of these clients conveyed that they had not received voter registration information and that there were no posters or signs with this information.

Advocates have requested a meeting by April 15, 2021 to discuss how the City can work with key stakeholders to ensure that eligible persons on Rikers Island have full and fair access to vote.

###

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 145 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