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

***NYC DEFENDERS STATEMENT ON DEATH OF
BRANDON RODRIGUEZ IN DOC CUSTODY***

(NEW YORK, NY) – *Gothamist* [reports](#) that 25-year old Brandon Rodriguez was found dead in his cell on Rikers Island on August 10. A healthcare worker on Rikers Island told *Gothamist* that: “Rodriguez’s death is in the context of an acute humanitarian crisis fueled by DOC staff shortages and poor facility management.”

Brooklyn Defender Services, The Bronx Defenders, The Legal Aid Society, Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, and New York County Defender Services issued the following statement regarding Mr. Rodriguez’s death:

“We are deeply saddened by Mr. Rodriguez’s death in DOC custody, and demand the immediate decarceration of New Yorkers currently held in unacceptable conditions on Rikers Island and in all New York City jails. As advocates, we have been raising the alarm about substandard care and inhumane treatment in these locations for many years, yet the conditions have continued to deteriorate. The pandemic has both exacerbated and exposed the deplorable circumstances in which our incarcerated neighbors are forced to live.

While we are still learning the specific circumstances of Mr. Rodriguez’s death, it comes at a time when COVID-19 and already-dangerous conditions are wreaking havoc in the jails and increasing the threat to incarcerated people’s lives in myriad ways. Rikers Island is dangerously overcrowded. The jail population has surged past pre-pandemic levels, while the [failure](#) of DOC staff to [report to work](#) has left many of our clients without adequate food, medical attention, or access to basic services that the City is legally required to provide.

Meanwhile, jails are growing more crowded by the day and COVID-19 infection rates are ticking back up as the highly-contagious Delta variant spreads. 5,902 people were held on Rikers as of August 6, 2021, more than the 5,557 people caged there on March 16, 2020, the early days

of the pandemic, when the virus raged through the jails. The situation is particularly dangerous given the findings of the [bombshell Board of Correction report](#) we obtained in March, which concluded that overcrowding in city jails contributed to the death of three people in DOC custody last year.

The solution is obvious: The City must reduce its jail population immediately or callously risk more deaths in DOC custody.

There is simply no reason for prosecutors to continue to seek bail, which amounts to a potential death sentence on pending charges. We call on the City's District Attorneys and the courts to recognize the role their position on bail plays in exposing people to life-threatening conditions and human rights abuses. The City must use every tool at its disposal to release people from Rikers and all its jails. It is a matter of life and death.

As we mourn Mr. Rodriguez, we will continue to fight for the freedom of our neighbors and safe conditions for all incarcerated New Yorkers.”
