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

***NYC Defenders Urge Mayor, Governor, and DOCCS
Commissioner to Immediately Address the Humanitarian
Crisis in New York City's Jails***

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society, Brooklyn Defender Services, The Bronx Defenders, New York County Defender Services, Queens Defenders and Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, in a recently issued letter, called on Mayor Bill de Blasio, Governor Kathy Hochul, DOCCS Commissioner Anthony Annucci, and DOC Commissioner

Vincent Schiraldi to immediately address the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the New York City jails.

The letter states:

The jails simply cannot house people safely. In addition to the increasing spread of COVID-19, a mass wave of staff absenteeism has created an extraordinarily dangerous disruption to both security and basic services for people in custody. For this reason among many other complex factors, the New York City Department of Correction (“DOC”) cannot presently maintain basic levels of health, safety and security in the jails. Incarcerated people are locked in housing areas for days with no food, showers, access to lawyers or medical visits. They are not being protected from violence.

With this in mind, we urge you to take the following steps without delay:

- *First, we ask you to work with us to urge prosecutors and judges to use their discretion to both reduce the number of people sent to jail and release people currently held in the city jails. Prosecutors and judges' willingness to decarcerate saved lives at the height of the pandemic and a similar will is necessary in the present extraordinary circumstances. We also urge Commissioner Schiraldi to brief the chief administrative judges and five New York City District Attorneys as to the horrific conditions in city jails and urge increased scrutiny around bail requests/bail setting and any other prosecutorial/judicial action that increases the current DOC population.*
- *Second, as the Mayor did during the first wave of the pandemic, he should exercise the power conferred by Correction Law Article 6-A to grant work release to people serving sentences in city jails. The Mayor's prior intervention resulted in a meaningful reduction in the jail population, removing people from congregate settings as infections spiked.*
- *Third, the Mayor must take all available measures to address the staff absenteeism and end all triple and quadruple shifts by correction officers.*
- *Fourth, the Governor should immediately sign the “Less Is More Act” (S1144 Benjamin /A5576 Forrest), a bill that would overhaul New York's punitive parole revocation system. Of immediate relevance, Less Is More would eliminate mandatory detention in cases where people were charged with violating their parole and dramatically limit incarceration as a sanction for any technical violation of parole. To ensure these tools are immediately applied to this crisis situation, Acting Commissioner Annucci should exercise his discretion to operationalize Less Is More immediately and lift the parole violation warrants for those people currently in city custody. As of August 25, there were*

269 people in city jails who were only charged with technical violations of parole and were not charged with any new crime. The passage of Less is More by the New York State legislature was vindication of the principle that the over-incarceration of people on parole was bad public policy; to continue to house people who would be released under that bill in the current unsafe environment is beyond unjustifiable.

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