

August 30, 2021

Contact:

Sam McCann, Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem (SMccann@ndsny.org)

Daniel Ball, Brooklyn Defender Services (DBall@bds.org)

Emily Whitfield, The Bronx Defenders (Ewhitfield@bronxdefenders.org)

Press Office, The Legal Aid Society (press@legal-aid.org)

Lupe Todd-Medina, New York County Defender Services (LToddmedina@nycds.org)

Hettie Powell, Queens Defenders (hpowell@queensdefenders.org)

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

NYC DEFENDERS' STATEMENT ON DEATH OF SEGUNDO GUALLPA AT RIKERS ISLAND

(NEW YORK, NY) – *Gothamist* [reports](#) that 58-year-old Segundo Gualpa passed away on Monday, August 30th of an apparent suicide in Department of Correction (DOC) custody. A healthcare worker on Rikers Island told *Gothamist* that: “People are sicker, they’re not able to get healthcare that they need, and that includes mental health care. The fact there have been so many people who have harmed themselves recently is of great concern.” Only 20 days have elapsed since the [last reported death by suicide](#) in the city jails.

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

“Mr. Gualpa’s death in DOC custody is a tragedy, and we are deeply saddened by the loss of his life. Mr. Gualpa was at least the ninth person to pass away at Rikers Island this year, as the jail population grows to levels not seen since before the pandemic and jail conditions create an unconscionable humanitarian crisis. To protect the health, safety, and lives of those incarcerated in city jails, we urge our elected officials, judges, and prosecutors to take swift action to remove people from this life-threatening environment.

The escalating spread of COVID-19 in the jails, a mass wave of staff absenteeism, persistent mismanagement, and a toxic staff culture have created an extremely dangerous situation in which incarcerated people do not have basic levels of healthcare, safety and security. We demand that our elected leaders address this crisis; ask prosecutors and judges to use their discretion to reduce the number of people sent to jail and release people currently held in the city jails; and urge the

DOC to use its power to release people currently held in city jails and to treat those who remain in custody with basic human dignity.

New York City must take decisive action to reduce the jail population and prevent further suffering, before yet another life is lost.”
