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

Legal Aid Statement on the Death of Client Esias Johnson on Rikers Island

(NEW YORK, NY) - **The Legal Aid Society** released the following statement on the death of their client Esias Johnson on Rikers Island. Mr. Johnson is at least the tenth person to die in Department of Correction custody in 2021:

“We were devastated to learn of the tragic death of our client Esias Johnson, who was only 24 years old. He was a beloved son and brother. We mourn alongside his family, and we join their call for answers.

Mr. Johnson is the latest victim of a New York City jail system in crisis. In addition to the increasing spread of COVID-19, a mass wave of staff absenteeism has compounded long-standing problems to create an extraordinarily dangerous situation for people in custody, particularly those in need of medical and mental health care. Mr. Johnson and his family deserved better--and so do the people still in custody and those who love them.

The Department of Correction continues to demonstrate that it cannot house people safely. Mr. Johnson is at least the third person to die on Rikers in the last 30 days. Reducing the jail population is the only way to avoid further deaths and swift action is desperately needed. We call for City Hall, the District Attorneys, the courts, and every stakeholder in the criminal system to take immediate steps to remove people from this dangerous situation.”

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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 over 140 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.

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