

THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY

Justice in Every Borough.

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

Legal Aid Asks Court to Hold City in Contempt for Consistently Violating Court Order in Landmark City Jails Conditions Case

City has Withheld Mandated Data on Ventilation Efforts at City Jails

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society filed a [letter](#) today [petitioning](#) the court in *Benjamin v. Schiraldi* - a landmark consolidated class action about conditions in the City jails resulting in court orders on fire risks, extreme temperatures, and sanitation and ventilation deficiencies - to sanction the City for failing in its legal obligation to provide comprehensive reporting on ventilation efforts at local jails.

As part of the supplemental remedial order in Benjamin, the Court required the City to provide timely ventilation-related data to Legal Aid and the Office of the Compliance Consultants (OCC), the monitoring office created by this lawsuit. OCC is then expected to use that data to assess the quality of ventilation inside of the city jails and publish its conclusions in [periodic progress reports three times yearly](#).

The City has substantially stopped providing these reports, profoundly undercutting OCC's mandate and leaving the parties with little information about compliance with the ventilation orders and the state of ventilation inside of the New York City Department of Correction's aging, crumbling buildings. The City's noncompliance accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the need for effective ventilation was at its zenith. As COVID-19 continues to infect New Yorkers, it is critical that the City provide ventilation-related metrics about the City jails, congregate settings where the virus can spread quicker than in the community.

"The conditions in the City jails are a matter of grave public concern, especially given the importance of good ventilation in preventing COVID-19 in a congregate jail setting. The New York City Department of Correction simply cannot be permitted to withhold this critical information that the public should have," said **Veronica Vela**, **Supervising Attorney with the Prisoners' Rights Project at The Legal Aid Society**.

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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 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