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

***NYIFUP Statement on Client Reports of a Widespread  
COVID-19 Outbreak in New York Jail Impacting Immigrants  
in ICE Detention***

***Attorneys Condemn Orange County Correctional Facility's Failure to  
Protect Detained Clients and Demand Release of Incarcerated  
Immigrants***

(New York, NY) – **The Legal Aid Society, Brooklyn Defender Services, and The Bronx Defenders** – New York City's defender organizations providing free legal representation to detained immigrants through the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) – today released the below statement in response to client reports of a new widespread COVID-19 outbreak at Orange County Correctional Facility. To date, according to NYIFUP clients, **at least 50 people** are reportedly symptomatic in one unit, and jail officials have repeatedly failed to provide access to vaccination and take appropriate quarantine measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

**According to Jose Luis who is currently incarcerated at Orange County Correctional Facility**, "The quarantine section is full, and there are a lot of sick people everywhere. Correction officers are letting people out of the intake process without knowing their COVID-19 results, so you don't know who's sick and who isn't. We are waiting so long for medical care. I am trying to stay safe by just lying alone in my bed in my cell, but I feel like soon I'll become a vegetable, I'm becoming weaker by the day."

NYIFUP released the following statement:

“It is unacceptable that people at Orange County Correctional Facility are denied adequate medical care while the coronavirus is surging within the walls of the detention facility. Detaining people in already inhumane conditions—now overwhelmed with Omicron which is known to be much more transmissible—poses a grave threat to the health of those in immigration custody. This outbreak underscores the flagrant lack of measures in place to protect incarcerated individuals, and how this negligence puts the health and safety of everyone in immigration detention at risk every day. Moreover, we condemn the lack of transparency from jail officials and from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Their refusal to provide critical information about how they are addressing the outbreak and the jail’s quarantine policy is unacceptable.

ICE’s negligence in the handling of COVID-19 transmissions in their facilities further obstructs our clients’ rights and access to counsel — making it even more difficult for them to adequately fight their removal cases. Virtual visits between people and their defense teams have been fraught for years with technical issues and have only gotten worse during the pandemic. When in-person visits are allowed, clients and their defense team do not have privacy or access to interpreters.

ICE must release all people in immigration detention, especially those who are immunocompromised or have medical conditions that put them at heightened risk of death or serious illness if infected. Immigration enforcement is a civil, not criminal matter. The most humane way to stop this outbreak and the spread of COVID-19 is to decarcerate.”

“I am appalled to learn of the horrifying conditions that our incarcerated populations are being subjected to at the Orange County Correctional Facility,” **said Assembly Member Karines Reyes.** “We have an obligation to treat those under our care with dignity and respect. The failure to properly implement health and safety protocols puts incarcerated individuals and staff at risk. Although immediate action is needed to address the spread of COVID-19, this outbreak underscores the need to pass long term solutions like the Dignity Not Detention Act. No one should ever be exposed to such adverse conditions, but there are countless individuals who are detained by ICE and housed at the facility simply due to their immigration status. They must be released to alleviate pressure on the system to allow for better containment of COVID-19.”

“The stories I have heard from advocates regarding conditions at Orange County Jail are very alarming,” **said Assembly Member Harvey Epstein.** “There is a high positivity rate among incarcerated New Yorkers and the Corrections Department is failing them at all levels; distributing vaccinations and boosters, allowing or creating space to isolate or quarantine, just to name a few. One simple way Corrections can address lack of space to quarantine is by ending contracts with ICE to hold our neighbors facing deportation in prisons. The Governor must immediately pass the Dignity Not Detention Act.”

"Reports of immigrants held at Orange County Jail being denied COVID testing and space to quarantine is appalling, and puts the lives of detainees at risk. They should be immediately released. Being undocumented in this country should not be a death sentence," **said NYC Council Member Shekar Krishnan.**

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*The New York Family Immigrant Unity Project (NYIFUP) is the nation's first public defender system for immigrants facing deportation—defined as those in removal proceedings before an immigration judge. Funded by the New York City Council since July 2014, the program provides a free attorney to almost all detained indigent immigrants facing deportation at the Varick Street Immigration Court in New York City.*