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

***Legal Aid Statement on Board of Correction Report Concerning Recent Deaths
of New Yorkers in City Custody***

(NEW YORK, NY) - Tina Luongo, Chief Attorney of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society, released the following statement in response to a New York City Board of Correction (BOC) [report](#) on February and March 2022 deaths of New Yorkers in the custody of the New York City Department of Correction (DOC):

“Today’s BOC report, coming on the heels of the death by suicide of 25-year-old Deshawn Carter on Rikers Island over the weekend, underscores the profound disfunction of New York City’s jails and the persistent incapacity of the City’s Department of Correction to keep people safe. The report’s investigation into the deaths of three other men at Rikers Island this year – Tarz Youngblood, George Pagan and Herman Diaz – links those deaths to egregious breaches of basic jail management and staffing.

The Board found that all three deaths were the result of the City leaving entire sections of Rikers Island unstaffed, so that entire housing areas do not even have an officer on duty to provide emergency medical assistance or bring people to medical clinics. While New York City has the largest contingent of correction officers per incarcerated person of any jail in the nation, the City has allowed about 30 percent of those officers to stay home on unlimited sick leave or work desk jobs outside the jails. The impact of this staff sick-out has gotten even worse, with March 2022 showing a dramatic increase in the number of incarcerated people not brought to medical clinics – a failure directly linked to the lack of staff available to move people within the jails. Under Commissioner Molina’s watch, 12,745 scheduled medical appointments were missed in the month of March alone.

The Board also noted ongoing, systemic failures by both DOC and Correctional Health Services to deliver necessary emergency medical and mental health care. It is no surprise that news reports of Mr. Carter’s death over the weekend suggest that Mr. Carter suffered from a mental illness but was nonetheless placed in a general population area, where he reportedly died by hanging without being noticed by staff. In [testimony](#) to the New York City Council two weeks ago, Legal Aid decried failures in New York City’s suicide screening protocols and made concrete recommendations to save lives.

Today’s report and Mr. Carter’s death reinforce that the City is no longer able to confine people safely. Immediate decarceration of the jails is now an urgent matter of life and death.”

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