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

Legal Aid Lauds Publication of New Landmark Prison Labor Report from The American Civil Liberties Union, University of Chicago Law School

(NEW YORK, NY) - **The Legal Aid Society** issued the following statement in response to the publication of [Captive Labor: Exploitation of Incarcerated Workers](#), a first-of-its-kind national report from the American Civil Liberties Union and the University of Chicago Law School Global Human Rights Clinic. The report cites research and data analysis conducted by The Legal Aid Society's Leighann Starkey, Director of Data for the Criminal Defense Practice, and Jacalyn Goldzweig, a Paralegal Casehandler in the Employment Law Unit.

Leighann Starkey, Director of Data for the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society, said:

"We applaud the ACLU and Jennifer Turner for this rigorous investigation of America's exploitative prison labor systems. All New Yorkers deserve dignity and respect. Ending the exploitation and brutality within our state and national prison labor systems is an essential economic justice and racial justice issue - and understanding is the first step toward progress.

Since 2019, The Legal Aid Society has been working in coalition to end the prison-slavery exception in New York State's constitution and to expand workers' rights to incarcerated workers – who earn as little as \$0.10 per hour providing vital public and prison maintenance services – as a steering committee leader of the [13th Forward](#) coalition.

We join the ACLU in calling on federal and state legislators to ensure that all work in prisons is fully voluntary by eliminating policies and laws that punish incarcerated people who are unwilling or unable to work. Incarcerated workers must be allowed the same labor protections afforded to other workers in the United States, including minimum wage, health and safety standards, protection from discrimination, the right to form a union, and speedy access to redress when their rights are violated.”

Key findings from *Captive Labor* include:

- Nearly two thirds (**65 percent**) of incarcerated people report working behind bars – amounting to roughly 800,000 workers incarcerated in prisons.
- More than three quarters of incarcerated workers surveyed (**76 percent**) report facing punishment — **such as solitary confinement, denial of sentence reductions, or loss of family visitation** — if they decline or are unable to work.
- Prison laborers are **at the mercy of their employers**. They have no control over their work assignments, are excluded from minimum wage and overtime protections, are unable to unionize, do not receive adequate training and equipment, and are denied workplace safety guarantees despite often dangerous working conditions.
- As a result, **64 percent** of incarcerated workers surveyed report worrying about their safety while working; **70 percent** say they received no formal job training; and 70 percent report not being able to afford basic necessities like soap and phone calls with prison labor wages.
- More than **80 percent** of prison laborers do **general prison maintenance**, which subsidizes the cost of our bloated prison system.

Read the full report here: [aclu.org/captivelabor](https://www.aclu.org/captivelabor)

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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