

# THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY

Justice in Every Borough.

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

## ***Amid Heatwave Plaguing New York City, Legal Aid Demands Answers from DOC on Measures Taken to Protect Incarcerated New Yorkers***

(NEW YORK, NY) – **The Legal Aid Society**, in a recently issued [letter](#), called for answers from the New York City Department of Correction (DOC) as to how the Department plans on protecting incarcerated New Yorkers from illness amid the heatwave plaguing New York City.

At a recent New York City Board of Correction (BOC) [hearing](#), DOC admitted that 57 incarcerated people deemed “heat-sensitive” because of their particular medical vulnerability to heat-related illness were inexplicably not housed in air-conditioned housing even though they had not refused housing. Nine other heat-sensitive individuals were denied air-conditioning due to so-called “security overrides.”

In response, Legal Aid demands that DOC confirm that all of the people deemed heat-sensitive have since been offered air-conditioned housing, and if they have refused such housing, provide evidence of such refusals.

The letter also urges the City to move all individuals confined to their cells for more than ten hours per day to air-conditioned units, which includes individuals held in Enhanced Supervision Housing and in any other cell-bound unit. BOC minimum standards for restrictive housing, which Mayor Adams suspended by Executive Order, requires air-conditioning for heat-sensitive individuals because being enclosed in one’s cell for long periods of time creates an extraordinary heat risk.

Legal Aid also requested that when people are not housed in air-conditioned areas, the City must provide free access to cool showers and plentiful ice. If any of the housing areas cannot provide cool water (as was the case in the Brooklyn House of Detention, which blended all water to warm), then those individuals must be moved to an area where cool showers are available.

In previous summers, when the Department has delivered ice, it has consisted of nothing more than a single dixie cup of ice for each adult, which is plainly inadequate. Under no circumstances should any person in the City be locked into a room without access to ice, cold water showers, potable drinking water or air conditioning this week.

Finally, since heat stroke can be fatal, the letter demands that correctional staff and health care staff engage in near-constant rounding in the correctional facilities to assess the presence of increased health risks and whether incarcerated persons are showing signs of heat-related illness.

“As this heatwave begins, it’s imperative that the City improve its historic ineptitude in following its heat protocols and protect incarcerated New Yorkers from heat-related illnesses,” said **Mary Lynne Werlwas, Director of the Prisoners’ Rights Project at The Legal Aid Society**. “People in custody don’t have access to cooling centers, and in past years, we’ve heard horror stories from clients who were deprived of basic means to stay safe during hot weather. Lastly, DOC must publicly release daily temperature readings from inside the jails, and a daily census of housing in air-conditioned units, so that New Yorkers in free society can help protect people held in the jails.”

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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 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](http://www.legalaidnyc.org)*