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

Legal Aid Statement on Michael Nieves, the 13th New Yorker to Pass in DOC Custody this Year

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society issued the below statement on the [death](#) of Michael Nieves, the 13th New Yorker to pass in New York City Department of Correction's (DOC) custody this year:

“The reports that New York City’s uniformed correction officers stood idly and watched Michael Nieves, our client, end his life are infuriating and tragic, but not surprising. It is heartbreaking that a person with severe mental illness was not in a hospital receiving care, but was held behind bars at the mercy of such demonstrably callous and incompetent jailers.

This is a jail that still employs staff who watched Nicholas Felicano hang himself for eight minutes in 2019. Even after criminal indictments brought years later, a captain and correction officer are still collecting paychecks, having suffered only a 30-day suspension. The news that staff who similarly watched Mr. Nieves suffer received the same temporary slap on the wrist gives no confidence that true accountability will be forthcoming.

The federal monitor described a similar incident last year, as well as other examples of truly grotesque disregard for human life by DOC uniformed staff and stunning breaches of basic correctional competence that precipitate such incidents. That this week’s tragedy occurred in the unit of the jail that is ostensibly most trained and equipped to jail people with serious mental illness underscores the jail’s fundamental inability to keep safe the people in DOC’s care.

The Adams Administration has failed to respond to the gross incompetence of its staff and leadership with urgency and leadership, resulting in the shocking death toll on this Administration’s watch. We demand the immediate release of the videos of the staff during this incident so that New Yorkers can truly understand what takes place in the jails, and so that this depraved response to a mental health crisis is not swept under the rug as have been countless others.

We further demand that the City describe with specificity what *more* it will do to address staff’s disregard for basic suicide prevention protocols and basic correctional practice. This avoidable incident illustrates the systemic failures, and lack of a meaningful response, that have led Legal Aid to seek federal court intervention in the appointment of a receiver.

Our hearts ache for Mr. Nieves' family, friends and community, and the countless other New Yorkers who have been touched by these tragic and completely avoidable incidents.”

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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