



November 1, 2022

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

With One Week Until Election Day, Legal Aid, Advocates and Elected Officials Call on NYC Board of Elections to Ensure Access to Early Voting for Incarcerated New Yorkers

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society, New York Civil Liberties Union, Latino Justice, VOCAL-NY, Freedom Agenda, elected officials, impacted New Yorkers and others, ahead of the general election, rallied outside of the New York City Board of Elections (BOE) to demand greater access to early voting for people incarcerated in City jails, as mandated by [New York State law](#), which states that “polling places for early voting shall be located so that voters in the county have adequate and equitable access.”

Advocates called on the BOE to open at least one early voting location on Rikers Island, or to establish in-person absentee voting at the facility, as is currently provided within each BOE borough office.

New Yorkers held in pre-trial detention, serving a city sentence, or remanded on parole, which accounts for 90 percent of the jail population, are legally entitled to vote yet are deprived of this fundamental right due to the BOE’s failure to ensure access to early voting.

The lack of voting access in City jails, where more than [88 percent](#) of people incarcerated are Black and Latinx, effectively lowers voter participation in communities of color and disproportionately impacts people in those communities. It leaves thousands of eligible voters without the option to vote early – the only option to vote in person for those who are currently incarcerated.

“Our clients and all those incarcerated at Rikers who are eligible to vote – a whopping 90 percent of the local jail population – have the legal right to vote and must be granted early access to cast

their ballots come election time,” said **Anthony Posada, supervising attorney of the Community Justice Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. “By refusing to establish early voting locations at these facilities, the BOE is blatantly disenfranchising an entire population of eligible voters. We call on BOE to immediately open these voting sites to ensure that our clients have a role in democracy.”

Cesar Z. Ruiz, EJW Fellow, LatinoJustice PRLDEF, said: “Our state laws maintain the right to vote for New Yorkers being held in custody, and the Board of Elections is duty-bound to uphold that sacred right. The Board’s inaction and lack of urgency on this matter is unconscionable, especially given that huge racial disparities in who is involved in our criminal legal system means that current practices shut out hundreds of thousands of Black, and Latino voices from our democratic process. We need a polling place in Rikers island now!”

Greg Williams, member of Freedom Agenda, said: "I am a committed voter - I take that right and responsibility seriously. When I was sent to Rikers days before the 2020 election, I knew I still had the right to vote while I awaited my hearing, but I quickly saw there wasn't actually any functional system for me to do that. The BOE needs to step in here to protect the rights of ALL eligible voters."

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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