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

Legal Aid Statement in Response to the Board of Correction's Proposed Resolution to Decrease Its Annual Meetings and Its Decision to Cap the Number of Public Comments at Today's Meeting

(NEW YORK, NY) – **The Legal Aid Society** released the following statement in response to the New York City Board of Correction (BOC)'s proposed resolution to decrease its number of annual meetings and its decision to cap the number of public comments it will hear at the today's public meeting:

“We strongly oppose BOC’s proposed resolution to decrease by one-third the number of annual meetings it holds. BOC serves a critical role of overseeing a sprawling City jail system that is crumbling. The public depends on BOC to monitor conditions in the City’s jails, and BOC meetings are one of the few occasions where Department of Correction (DOC) officials are held accountable for how they treat people in their care. The City jails are in a state of humanitarian crisis, illustrated by the death of 19 persons in custody in 2022, and another preventable death last week. BOC’s oversight is needed now more than ever. Yet the proposed resolution will further shield DOC’s actions from scrutiny and undoubtedly hinder efforts to resolve the ongoing emergency.

“The proposed resolution is especially troubling in light of DOC’s pattern of obstructing its overseers. For example, last month DOC brazenly revoked BOC’s independent access to video footage from inside the jails and forbade the use of such video in BOC’s work. BOC immediately denounced this decision as contrary to the terms of the New York City Charter. If BOC were to reduce how often it meets, it would play right into DOC’s hands by further restricting its own oversight. We strongly urge Board Members to reject this resolution.

“Moreover, BOC announced via email yesterday, just one day before today's meeting, that it would limit the number of people allowed to comment during the three public comment periods at the meeting to ‘elected officials and the first six people to sign-up for each comment period (first three in-person and first three online).’ BOC established this restriction for a meeting where controversial variances limiting incarcerated people’s access to mail and packages will be put to a vote, where DOC’s failure to provide access to medical care will be discussed, and where ongoing issues with drugs and violence in the jails will be addressed.

“At such an important meeting, and at a time when New Yorkers in DOC custody face numerous dangers, the BOC should promote transparency, not restriction. Yet BOC’s decision drastically curtails its ability to hear from concerned members of our community, including people directly impacted by DOC’s operations. It also leaves to chance — namely, how quickly someone can sign a form at the meeting or register on a computer system — who will be permitted to share their opinion. In this moment and amidst this crisis, BOC should amplify — not quell — the public voice. BOC must rescind this cap, permit all interested community members to exercise their voices, and embrace transparency in this moment of upheaval.”

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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