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

Legal Aid Statement on the Tragic Death of Jordan Neely

(NEW YORK, NY) – **The Legal Aid Society** issued the following statement on the tragic death of Jordan Neely, the 30-year-old New Yorker whose life was taken earlier this month on the subway:

“As New York City’s oldest and largest public defender organization, we center the presumption of innocence and due process in our work. These enshrined constitutional protections apply to everyone.

“The tragic death of Jordan Neely, if anything, illuminates the existence of two different legal systems: one for white people, and the other, a far more racist, classist, and punitive system, for Black and Latinx New Yorkers.

“The treatment afforded to Daniel Penny, the man charged with manslaughter for the death of Mr. Neely, is vastly different from what our clients experience every day.

“Even with video evidence, Mr. Penny was allowed to leave an active homicide scene after being questioned by police. This provided him the opportunity to hire counsel before any charges were brought and arrange a safe surrender over a week later. During this time, he remained at liberty; at home with his family and community.

“The low-income New Yorkers we represent would never be allowed to leave the scene after questioning as the prime suspect, let alone have an opportunity to obtain counsel and pre-arrange bail to secure an amount affordable to avoid incarceration at Rikers Island, a facility mired in a full-fledged humanitarian crisis.

“If the roles had been reversed, Mr. Neely, if he was not injured or killed by officers at the scene, would have been arrested, processed immediately and remanded to Rikers Island with his ‘mugshot’ plastered on the front of every newspaper. The process for Mr. Neely in this scenario would have lasted mere hours, not days.

“Let us be clear: We are not advocating against a thorough police investigation prior to arresting and taking an accused person into custody, and we certainly are not calling for the incarceration of anyone at Rikers Island or another local jail. We are demanding that everyone, regardless of the color of their skin or financial status, receive the same respect and consideration from the police, the prosecution, and the court system, including a measured response, deliberate pre-arrest investigation, and maintenance of the presumption of innocence, notwithstanding video footage of the alleged crime.

“Mr. Neely was known throughout our organization as a kind, talented, gentle, and considerate human being, whose smile brightened every room he entered. In his final moments, he begged for food and water, but was instead met with violence and apathy. This is an all-too-common reality that people of color across our city, state and country face each and every day.”

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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