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

Legal Aid Decries DOC for Failing to Conduct Fire Safety Inspections for Over One Year at the North Infirmiry Command at Rikers Island

(NEW YORK, NY) - **The Legal Aid Society** today decried the New York City Department of Correction (DOC) for [failing to conduct fire safety inspections](#) for over a year at the North Infirmiry Command (NIC) at Rikers Island. A recent [DOC audit](#) of the Fire Safety Office post revealed that no mandated weekly or monthly Fire Safety reports were conducted from April 1, 2022 to April 30, 2023.

This comes one month after the Office of Compliance Consultants, a court-appointed monitor, released a [progress report](#) detailing thousands of dangerous health and safety [violations](#) across all Rikers Island facilities. Many of these violations pertained to fire safety risks and hazards.

Rikers Island has experienced numerous fires over the last decade. In April, a fire at NIC injured 20 incarcerated persons and staff, including two who suffered serious burns, after the sprinkler system failed. An investigation of that fire, which likely led to the audit of fire safety inspections, revealed that the sprinkler system had been taken offline after being damaged. DOC could not determine how long the sprinkler system was non-functional.

“This pattern of gross noncompliance at Rikers Island continues to put lives at risk,” said **Veronica Vela, supervising attorney with the Prisoners’ Rights Project at The Legal Aid Society**. “The recent fire safety audit has proven, once again, that DOC has little interest in providing safe and humane living conditions for the people incarcerated at their facilities. The unfortunate truth is that as long as Rikers Island is open, everyone who lives and works there is in constant danger from numerous, ever-present, unaddressed safety violations.”

Background:

In 1975, Legal Aid brought class action litigation ([Benjamin v. Molina](#)) that challenged a broad range of environmental conditions and practices in the entire New York City jail system, including fire risks, sanitation deficiencies, and ventilation system concerns. The suit resulted in court orders that mandate the DOC to comply with minimum environmental standards and established the Office of Compliance Consultants.

A [progress report](#) released July 5, 2023, by the Office of Compliance Consultants, the court monitor, painted a dire picture of dangerous health and safety conditions in local jails between the period of January 2023 to April 2023. Inspections recorded thousands of *Benjamin* violations distributed across all jail facilities.

More information on the recent progress report: <https://tinyurl.com/57w7695k>.

Moreover, the Monitor repeatedly noted that the production of these reports has become increasingly difficult due to DOC's refusal to provide accurate and timely data, if any data at all, on a range of relevant topics.

This is in keeping with DOC's general attitude against transparency and its failure to comply with judicial orders under Commissioner Louis Molina's tenure, including recent decisions to cease [public notifications of deaths in custody](#); to eliminate the New York City's Board of Correction's [unfettered access to video footage](#); to petition a court to keep secret a [special report](#) on jail violence; to [tamper with Rikers Island intake records](#); to plead with the Nunez Monitor to refrain from publicly releasing a report detailing [egregious incidents](#) of DOC neglect involving five incarcerated individuals, while [suppressing information](#) about these incidents; to [falsify logbooks](#) so as to make it appear that officers were conducted their rounds, to name a few.

Photos of deplorable jail conditions: <https://tinyurl.com/bnxy89ah>.

Legal Aid's comments in response to the report: <https://tinyurl.com/6yhsa2dr>.

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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