

February 13, 2024

Contact:

Audrey Martin
Communications Coordinator
amartin@legal-aid.org
774.266.5233

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

On Election Day, Vote In NYC Jails Coalition Holds Rally in Support of Reforms to Increase Incarcerated Individuals' Access to Polls

(NEW YORK, NY) - **The Vote in NYC Jails Coalition**, on the first election day in New York City, held a rally calling on the Board of Elections (BOE) and Department of Correction (DOC) to invest in and commit to making sure all people incarcerated on Rikers Island and other NYC jails have their ballots cast and counted.

Members of the Coalition, [in a recently issued letter](#), demanded that the BOE provide detailed anonymized feedback about their rejections of ballots coming from Rikers Island from the past two years, as well as implement measures to meaningfully mitigate the rejection rate.

The BOE must also provide voters at Rikers with the same opportunity to vote in-person via the same mechanism the law provides for nursing home residents. This includes appointing election inspectors to preside over portable voting machines on-site at Rikers Island so that registered voters can cast their ballot directly, eliminating the need for a logistically complex curing process that the Board must undertake with regard to the absentee ballots of the detainees.

The Coalition also called on DOC to devote more resources around election season to support voters with registering to vote, requesting, receiving, and returning absentee ballots. Rallyers also called for the implementation of a voter education program to provide non-partisan resources on voting, which is critical to cultivating an informed and robust voting culture at NYC jails.

“The ability for all eligible New Yorkers to meaningfully participate in local, state, and federal elections is a fundamental right for all citizens regardless of their incarceration status,” said **Rigodis Appling, Staff Attorney with the Special Litigation Unit and Community Justice Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. “Yet individuals housed on Rikers Island and other City jails have repeatedly had their access to the polls hindered or outright denied due to a lack of meaningful action taken by BOE and DOC to reform the problematic, cumbersome way ballots are cast and counted in their facilities. These institutions must commit to enacting new policies to ensure that all eligible voters have the opportunity to make their voices heard on this and all Election Days in the future.”

“It is no secret that the conditions individuals face in Rikers are deplorable, an individual in their custody could be deceased before they exercise their fundamental right to vote which is an utter shame. We join our partners in calling for humane conditions in Rikers Island and for unfettered access to the ballot box. We will not stop until we build true access to our democracy for all members of our community,” said **Cesar Z. Ruiz, Associate Counsel at LatinoJustice PRLDEF**.

“Almost all the New Yorkers locked up on Rikers are presumed innocent and have a legal right to vote. But they have been effectively disenfranchised because of negligence and incompetence of the responsible

government agencies. We call on the powers that be in our great city to make sure that the Department of Correction and the Board of Election take all practical steps needed to provide voting access for our fellow citizens who are confined in NYC's jails," said **Robert Gangi, Director with the Police Reform Organizing Project.**

"Rikers Island is full of people who have already been failed by all levels of government, and are now having their access to voting severely limited," said **Darren Mack, Co-Director, Freedom Agenda.** "We need to remember that the huge majority of people in city jails are still eligible to vote. It's the Board of Elections' responsibility to protect that right, and to provide the means for every person at Rikers to exercise it."

"New York City must improve voting access for detainees at Rikers by addressing ballot rejection rates and investing in voter education within jails. Most detainees at Rikers are pre-trial and have the right to vote. We must invest in voter registration and education initiatives within our city's jails, ensuring that every voice is recognized and valued in our democratic process." said **Council Member Sandy Nurse.**

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