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*****MEDIA ADVISORY*****

In Advance of November General Election, Vote In NYC Jails Coalition to Hold Rally in Support of Reforms to Increase Incarcerated New Yorkers' Access to the Polls

(NEW YORK, NY) - **The Vote in NYC Jails Coalition** will hold a rally on Tuesday, October 22, 2024, at noon in City Hall Park in Manhattan calling on the New York City Board of Elections (BOE) and New York City Department of Correction (DOC) to invest in and commit to making sure that all people incarcerated in NYC jails have their ballots cast and counted this November. Polling sites in NY jails are essential to ensuring equal access to the ballot for all eligible voters.

This event is part of a series of rallies held each Election Day in 2024 to call for action and accountability from the Board of Elections and Department of Correction and ensure that each voter has their voice heard.

WHO: The Vote in NYC Jails Coalition including The Legal Aid Society, LatinoJustice PRLDEF, The Community Services Society of New York (CSS), Freedom Agenda, The Bronx Defenders, National Action Network, VOCAL-NY, League of Women Voters NYC, Sorensen Center for International Peace and Justice, New York City Public Advocate's Office, PROP (Police Reform Organizing Project), NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Five Boro Defenders, NYC Civic Engagement Commission, Legal Action Center, NYU Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law (CRIL).

WHERE: City Hall Park at Broadway &, Chambers St, New York, NY 10007

WHEN: Tuesday, October 22, 2024 at NOON

Background:

The [Vote in NYC Jails Coalition](#) is a group of legal service providers, government offices, and community-based organizations dedicated to delivering the full promise of enfranchisement to people currently incarcerated in jails. Members of the VJC routinely register people to vote in jails and provide them with information and education regarding their voting rights. The VJC also works with agencies to ensure voters receive registration forms, voter education, and absentee ballots. They regularly meet with both agencies to identify failure points and recommend improvements. Through this initiative, there has been an increase in

voter engagement and accountability for both agencies. However, in 2023, only 227 absentee ballots were returned to the Board of Elections and issues remain to ensure all returned ballots are counted. Thousands of New Yorkers miss out on this opportunity each Election Day to have their voices heard, and the Coalition has seen the absentee ballot process repeatedly fall short, preventing thousands at Rikers from having true access to the ballot.

Even though people incarcerated pre-trial or convicted of misdemeanors retain their right to vote, they face significant barriers to voting in jails within New York City. The VJC has worked with the Department of Correction and Board of Election to break down these barriers, and while lessened in severity, they remain. The process of ensuring ballot access to New Yorkers within jails is under-resourced and ineffective. Additionally, gaining access to information about candidates and elections can be extremely difficult for people who are incarcerated. Information about eligibility requirements and deadlines for voters can be out of date and circulated infrequently. People detained during the registration period may not have a meaningful opportunity to register to vote or request an absentee ballot before such period closes. People who enter a jail after the registration or absentee ballot deadline are excluded entirely from the voting process.

The current system of absentee ballot voting has led to widespread disenfranchisement in NYC jails, where the majority of eligible voters can not access the registration forms, absentee ballot request forms, or voter education necessary to vote. For the small number of people detained who are able to access those forms, confinement in a jail presents additional challenges to having their voice heard. Voters must rely on both the the DOC and BOE to return those forms and ultimately process them.

In June of this year, the Coalition delivered a [memorandum](#) to the Board of Elections and Department of Correction, detailing the agencies' repeated failures to provide meaningful ballot access to individuals detained in New York City's jails, and calling for the BOE to provide the same ballot access to people who are incarcerated as they do for those who are at liberty. The memorandum lays out the ways both agencies have violated the law by failing to create a process which enables individuals in detention, without freedom of movement, the ability to learn of or rectify mistakes on registration forms or absentee ballots and thus has deprived countless individuals of their fundamental right to vote.

We cannot say we live in a true democracy if we do not allow the most marginalized amongst us to vote. That includes people who are incarcerated in New York City's jails; their voices deserve to be heard.

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