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

***Legal Aid Statement on the Death of 29-Year-Old Client Ardit Billa at Rikers Island***

**(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society** issued the following statement on the death of Ardit Billa, who was only 29 years old when he died while incarcerated at Rikers Island:

“Over the weekend, we learned of the tragic death of 29-year-old Ardit Billa while he was incarcerated at Rikers Island. The circumstances remain unclear, and we call on the Department of Correction to immediately disclose this information to his family. We also demand a swift, independent, and impartial investigation.

“Rikers Island remains engulfed in a full-fledged humanitarian disaster. The daily suffering we hear from our clients — whether from deplorable facility conditions, denial of access to medical care, or staff violence — and the mounting deaths underscore why the status quo cannot continue and transformative change is needed. Year after year, the City has shown itself wholly incapable of keeping the people in its custody safe.

“Our hearts ache for Mr. Billa’s family, friends, and community during this most difficult time. No words can lessen the pain of losing a loved one under such circumstances. His passing is not only a devastating personal loss, but also a painful reminder of the human toll of Rikers Island’s ongoing crisis.”

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*The Legal Aid Society is a nonprofit organization that exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For nearly 150 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.*

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