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

Legal Aid Society Demands Investigation Into NYPD Custody Deaths and Unlawful Low-Level Arrests

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society sent a [letter](#) to the Office of the Inspector General for the New York City Police Department to [immediately investigate](#) a series of tragic deaths of New Yorkers held in police custody, including the recent death of client Christopher Nieves inside a courthouse holding cell.

On August 29, 2025, [Mr. Nieves](#), 46, was arrested for allegedly shoplifting food. While awaiting arraignment at Kings County Criminal Court, he was visibly in medical distress. His Legal Aid attorney observed him repeatedly collapse on the floor and noted his yellowed skin and bandaged foot. Both Mr. Nieves and his attorney urgently requested that New York City Police Department (NYPD) officers take him to a hospital. Despite these pleas, he was never transported for medical care. He died in custody hours later.

This tragedy follows the deaths of [Soso Ramishvili](#), a [43-year-old man](#), [Saniyah Cheatham](#), and [Musa Cetin](#), all of whom also died while detained by NYPD this year. In total, at least five New Yorkers have died in NYPD custody in 2025, three of them inside local courthouses waiting to be arraigned on low-level charges.

“The fact that New Yorkers are dying while in the NYPD’s custody, and detained at state courthouses on low-level charges, is unconscionable,” said **Meghna Philip, Director of the Special Litigation Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. “The NYPD’s so-called ‘quality of life’ policing is targeting vulnerable New Yorkers for petty offenses and literally costing lives. NYPD’s systemic failures, lack of transparency, and ongoing unlawful detention practices are unacceptable. These deaths demand urgent, independent investigation and structural reform.”

The Legal Aid Society is urging the Inspector General to:

- Collaborate with the Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) to independently investigate every death in NYPD custody;
- Adopt a policy of automatic investigation into all NYPD custody deaths, and publicly release urgent preliminary findings as well as a full report, similar to the Board of Correction’s independent reviews of Department of Correction fatalities; and
- Examine NYPD’s unlawful arrest practices, including widespread violations of CPL § 150.20, which requires appearance tickets for most low-level offenses rather than processing New Yorkers through the system.

NYPD's own reported data reveals troubling patterns:

- In the first half of 2025, more than 66,000 people were arrested for low-level offenses, yet fewer than one-third received appearance tickets.
- Arrests for fare evasion alone more than doubled in the first quarter of 2025 compared to the first quarter of 2024.
- Stark racial disparities persist: Black New Yorkers are arrested for appearance ticket-eligible offenses at four times the rate of white New Yorkers and are less likely to receive appearance tickets after arrest.

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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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