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

***Statement in Response to Reporting on 40 New Yorkers Who Died in NYPD
Custody in 2023 and 2024***

(NEW YORK, NY) - **Meghna Philip, Director of the Special Litigation Unit at The Legal Aid Society**, issued the following statement in response to [reporting](#) that 40 New Yorkers died in New York City Police Department (NYPD) custody in 2023 and 2024:

“This deeply troubling development underscores the urgent need for the Office of the Inspector General for the NYPD to launch a thorough investigation into the Department’s policies, training, and procedures for providing necessary medical assistance to those in custody.

“The lack of transparency surrounding these tragic deaths — and the NYPD’s poor handling of investigations into them — further reinforces the demand for immediate, sweeping reforms to confront a growing systemic crisis.

“New Yorkers deserve answers. Already this year, at least [nine](#) people have died in NYPD custody, including clients of The Legal Aid Society. Arrested for low-level, so-called ‘quality of life’ offenses, they desperately needed medical care. Instead, their pleas — and the appeals of their attorneys — went unanswered, with fatal consequences.”

Background:

Earlier this week, The Legal Aid Society sent a [letter](#) to the Office of the Inspector General for the NYPD 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 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 [nine](#) New Yorkers have died in NYPD custody in 2025, three of them inside local courthouses waiting to be arraigned on low-level charges.

The Legal Aid Society is urging the Inspector General to:

- Conduct a thorough and comprehensive investigation into NYPD's policies, trainings, and procedures to ensure people in NYPD custody receive urgent and necessary medical assistance.
- Conduct a thorough and comprehensive review of NYPD FID investigations of in-custody deaths for systemic deficiencies that allow officers to escape accountability for negligence or misconduct resulting in the deaths of civilians.
- 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.

The Legal Aid Society is calling on the City to:

- Mandate 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.

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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