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

Legal Aid Demands Immediate Action from ACS to End Dangerous and Unlawful Conditions for Detained Youth

Nearly 100 Children Forced to Sleep on Floors and in Classrooms at Local Detention Centers

(NEW YORK, NY) — The Legal Aid Society [called](#) on the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to take immediate action to end unsafe, inhumane, and unconstitutional conditions affecting nearly 100 youth currently held without assigned housing in the City's secure detention facilities — Crossroads Juvenile Center in Brooklyn and Horizon Juvenile Center in the Bronx.

In a [formal letter](#) sent to ACS Commissioner Jess Dannhauser, Legal Aid condemned the City's ongoing failure to provide detained youth with basic necessities — including a bed, education, and safety — calling the situation a “festering wound in New York City's detention system.”

“Children in the care and custody of ACS are being deprived of sleep, safety, and dignity,” said **Dawne Mitchell, Chief Attorney of the Juvenile Rights Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. “They are sleeping on floors, surrounded by noise and chaos, without access to basic hygiene or privacy. These are conditions no child should ever endure — especially not while in the custody of a City agency whose mandate is to protect and care for them. What's happening in these facilities is not just neglectful — it's a violation of their fundamental rights and a failure of the very systems meant to safeguard New York's most vulnerable youth.”

Children Forced to Sleep on Floors and in Hallways

At any given time, approximately one-third of the youth in ACS's two secure detention centers lack an assigned room. Instead, they are forced to sleep in hallways, classrooms, and visiting areas on makeshift plastic “boats,” chairs, or directly on the floor.

Youth subjected to these “non-traditional” sleeping arrangements are often awakened after only five or six hours of rest, face vermin infestations, and lack access to bathrooms and storage for personal belongings. Many have endured these conditions for months.

Troubling Violence and Neglect

The letter highlights an uptick in assaults and injuries inside ACS facilities — including violent incidents tied to limited staffing and overcrowding. Several youths have suffered serious injuries requiring hospitalization, including one child who received 70 stitches after an assault. Despite these alarming trends, ACS has reportedly failed to notify parents, guardians, and attorneys when youth are injured.

Educational Rights Denied

Unhoused youth are routinely denied consistent education and programming. State law mandates full-time schooling and meaningful vocational programming for detained youth, yet many are not brought to class or provided with basic materials.

Years of Inaction and Systemic Failure

ACS has known about these issues for more than two years but has failed to implement safe or meaningful solutions. Instead, DYFJ has requested repeated waivers of housing requirements from the state, effectively seeking permission to continue violating state standards.

Demands for Immediate Action

Legal Aid calls on ACS to:

- expand community-based alternatives to detention and utilize open beds in other ACS facilities;
- limit the duration of displacement for youth without a room;
- ensure access to education, meals, and programming for all youth;
- provide secure storage for personal belongings;
- publicly report data on youth housing status and facility conditions; and
- notify parents, guardians, and attorneys within 48 hours when a youth lacks assigned housing or is denied programming.

Background:

Legal Aid [first raised alarms](#) about these conditions in November 2023, when it was revealed that the ACS was forcing children to sleep in classrooms inside juvenile detention facilities. Youth as young as 14 reported being made to sleep on cots or directly on classroom floors — rather than in the single-occupancy rooms required under New York State regulations.

At that time, children represented by Legal Aid also described random assaults stemming from overcrowded and chaotic housing arrangements; chronic sleep deprivation caused by fear for their safety; hours-long waits to access restrooms and showers; and the inability to obtain clean clothing. Many reported being abruptly woken early in the morning and moved to other parts of the facility, including housing areas where they were not assigned, compounding the instability and trauma of detention.

In response, Legal Aid demanded answers from ACS and learned that the agency had quietly obtained a [waiver](#) from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), suspending the regulation that requires each child charged as a juvenile delinquent or juvenile offender, ages 13 and older, to be housed in a single room.

ACS cited an increase in the detention census as its justification for the waiver, yet it remains unclear how many children have been subjected to this practice — an arrangement that continues today across both ACS's secure juvenile detention centers.

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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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