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

***Legal Aid Society Condemns DOCCS for Ongoing Violations of New York's
Landmark HALT Solitary Confinement Law***

***Sworn Statements Collected From Dozens of Incarcerated New Yorkers
Contradict DOCCS' Compliance Claims***

***Attorneys Urge Court to Enforce Preliminary Injunction Amid DOCCS's
Widespread Failure to Comply with Established Law and Court Order***

(NEW YORK, NY) — The Legal Aid Society released a court [filing](#) today that includes new [sworn statements](#) from dozens of incarcerated New Yorkers revealing that the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) continues to impose unlawful isolation and lockdown conditions in prisons across the state, nine months after invoking a purported “emergency suspension” of key provisions of the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement Law (HALT).

The accounts, filed in [Smalls v. Martuscello](#), directly contradict DOCCS's claims that New York prisons are in compliance with HALT and that the suspension has ended in all but certain specialized housing units at just seven facilities. Earlier this year, Legal Aid [secured](#) a preliminary injunction against DOCCS for its unlawful and extensive rollback of the HALT law. The court blocked the suspension on a preliminary basis, finding that the plaintiffs were likely to succeed on their claim that DOCCS's suspension of HALT was arbitrary and capricious, and therefore ordered the suspension to stop.

[Ronald Alston](#), who is locked in his cell at Attica C.F. for at least 21 hours a day, stated in an affirmation that “It feels like I’m in SHU. I don’t get to socialize. I have no human contact; we’re yelling at one another all day. I feel frustrated. I feel taxed and tired – really tired.”

[Alfonso Smalls](#), who is locked in his cell at Cossackie CF for at least 21.5 hours every day, stated in an affirmation that “I feel very upset and depressed. Every time I want to do something, I am instead stuck in my cell the majority of the day. It is impossible for me to accomplish my goals and my rehabilitation under these circumstances.”

[Donavin Taveras](#), who remains in 24-hour cell confinement at Upstate C.F. with no access to programming, stated in an affirmation that “Being cooped up in a cell where you’re not able to move at all messes with you. I sit in one spot all day. I don’t talk to my family much and I can’t even explain what it’s like being with my thoughts all day.”

[Ronnie Diggs](#), who is locked in his cell between 21–24 hours a day at Upstate C.F., stated in an affirmation that “I feel like a caged animal and I feel trapped. It’s very small and depressing. It’s traumatizing ... These conditions mean that even if I am suicidal, it is not believed. I’m told I’m trying to pull a stunt.”

Read dozens of other sworn statements from incarcerated New Yorkers revealing how DOCCS is ignoring both established law and a court order [here](#).

“DOCCS is misleading the Court and the public about the true scope of the HALT suspension,” said **Antony Gemmell, Supervising Attorney with The Legal Aid Society’s Prisoners’ Rights Project**. “The truth, as dozens of incarcerated New Yorkers have bravely come forward to confirm, is that at prisons around the state, DOCCS continues to impose the kind of extreme, life-threatening isolation HALT was enacted to end. With the agency’s credibility in tatters, only decisive court action — beginning with enforcement of the preliminary injunction — can bring DOCCS into compliance with the law.”

Background

In court papers filed with the Albany County Supreme Court, Legal Aid presented sworn affirmations from three dozen incarcerated people at facilities across New York. Their accounts contradict DOCCS’s assertion that HALT’s suspension is limited to seven prisons and only affects programming in certain specialized housing units, called Residential Rehabilitation Units.

Instead, the statements reveal:

- Individuals incarcerated in general population at least 10 facilities—including Attica, Auburn, Clinton, Coxsackie, Eastern, Elmira, and Sing Sing—are routinely locked in their cells for over 17 hours a day, some up to 23.5 hours;
- Upstate Correctional Facility’s Residential Rehabilitation Unit, housing nearly 600 people, continues to deny mandated out-of-cell time and programming, despite DOCCS denying HALT is suspended at the facility; and
- People with disabilities and young adults, both explicitly protected under HALT, remain subject to near-constant confinement.

Legal Aid also challenges DOCCS’s claim that HALT does not apply to general population housing, calling that position “incorrect” and a “remarkable” misstatement of the agency’s obligations under HALT.

HALT prohibits cell confinement exceeding 17 hours per day except in limited circumstances following a disciplinary hearing or during a facility-wide emergency — a prohibition that protects people in general population. Legal Aid argues that DOCCS’s misinterpretation of HALT undermines the agency’s credibility and highlights the urgent need for judicial enforcement of the law’s mandates.

Despite the law’s requirements, DOCCS has invoked an “emergency suspension” since early 2025, citing long-term staffing shortages and operational disruptions — an action plaintiffs argue has been unlawfully extended.

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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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