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

On Election Day, Vote in NYC Jails Coalition and Electeds Demands Polling Sites and Equal Access to the Ballot for Incarcerated New Yorkers

(NEW YORK, NY) — The **Vote in NYC Jails Coalition** held an election day rally today outside the New York City Board of Elections (BOE) headquarters, calling on the BOE and the New York City Department of Correction (DOC) to ensure that every eligible voter incarcerated in city jails can cast a ballot that is counted — this election day and in all elections to come. They were joined by **New York Assemblymember Latrice Walker, Councilmember Tiffany Caban, Chris Alexander of NAACP, Victor Pate of The National Action Network (NAN), and Rev. Ron McHenry.**

The BOE is legally responsible for guaranteeing ballot access for all New Yorkers, yet each election day, it fails detained voters by refusing to assist with registration or voting processes. The agency routinely rejects registration forms, absentee ballot requests, and completed ballots from eligible incarcerated New Yorkers —often without explanation or the opportunity to cure these errors. Meanwhile, the DOC is not a designated voting agency and cannot independently administer a comprehensive jail voting program.

As of today, over 6,000 New Yorkers held at Rikers Island are eligible to vote. More than 92 percent of those detained are people of color, reflecting the deep racial disparities in the city's criminal legal system. By neglecting to facilitate voting in jails, the BOE and DOC are effectively disenfranchising Black and Brown New Yorkers.

To achieve true voting equity, the BOE must establish polling sites in city jails. In-jail polling sites would ensure that ballots are not rejected, that voters can immediately correct any issues, and that all eligible voters can cast ballots during the full voting period. Given the high turnover of the jail population, polling sites would also prevent eligible voters from missing deadlines due to changes in their custody status. Similar programs have been successfully implemented in other jurisdictions across the country.

“The Board of Elections’ persistent failure to provide meaningful ballot access for people incarcerated in New York City jails is not just bureaucratic neglect—it is a violation of fundamental democratic rights,” said **Takeasha Newton, Lead Community Organizer in the Community Justice Unit at The Legal Aid Society.** “Every year, thousands of eligible voters are silenced because the BOE refuses to fix a system that does not work. Establishing polling sites in jails is the only way to ensure that no New Yorker is disenfranchised for being poor or detained pretrial.”

“Every eligible voter in New York City, including those in jail, has the legal right to participate in our democracy,” said **Cesar Z. Ruiz, Associate Counsel at Latino Justice PRLDEF.** “When the Board of Elections and Department of Correction refuse to establish polling sites in jails, they silence the voices of New Yorkers who are overwhelmingly from our Black and Brown communities. The City must act now to establish polling sites in jails and guarantee that every New Yorker’s voice counts.”

"Voting is the most precious part of our politics and for far too long incarcerated people have been disenfranchised even when they have the right to vote. At a time like this when voting for the incarcerated allows them to protect their interests, it is imperative that we do everything to ensure that everyone incarcerated who is eligible can vote. There should be no excuse for denying those incarcerated their constitutional right to cast their vote and be counted among the American franchise; anything less is truly unconstitutional and unamerican. Let them vote because incarcerated lives matter, too," said **Jerome R. Wright, Co-Director, HALT Solitary Campaign**

"Today, many New Yorkers are casting their votes in critical local elections and hundreds of thousands have already voted early or via absentee ballot, but people incarcerated in New York City jails face insurmountable barriers to casting their vote, putting thousands at risk of disenfranchisement," said **Michael Klinger, Senior Jail Services Attorney with Brooklyn Defender Services**. "We join the Vote in NYC Jails Coalition to urge the Board of Elections and Department of Correction to ensure all voters incarcerated in NYC jails can have equal access to this fundamental right by establishing a polling site at Rikers Island."

"Voters in jail face countless unimaginable hurdles to casting their ballots, and New York City's failure to address these problems constitutes voter suppression. The city must do better, like many other cities across this country, to ensure voting access for all people who have the right to vote in jail," said **Lindsey Reynolds, Chair of the Committee for Criminal Justice Reform at the League of Women Voters of the City of New York**.

"The opportunity to vote and be civically engaged is a right that should never be taken away for any reason," said **Victor Pate Chairman of The National Action Network NYC Chapter Second Chance Committee and member of the Vote In NYC Jails Coalition**. "We the people have a constitutional right to vote and that right should not be infringed upon due to an individual's justice status, incarceration or otherwise. All eligible voters should have complete and full access to the ballot box. A polling site on Rikers Island would achieve that goal. Your right to vote should not end at the gates to Rikers Island, Free The Vote!"

"Under the current system, thousands of Black and Brown New Yorkers are denied one of the most fundamental civil rights — the right to have their votes counted. People held in jails are community members and New Yorkers whose voices matter, and every ballot left uncounted deprives their neighborhoods of fair representation and vital resources," said **Djuna Schamus, Legal Fellow at the Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law at NYU School of Law**.

Background

Since 2020, the Vote in NYC Jails Coalition has worked within Rikers Island to help people detained pretrial register to vote and request absentee ballots in advance of election day. This effort has led to increased voter engagement and awareness among incarcerated New Yorkers.

Despite these efforts, in 2024 only 546 people out of over 6,000 eligible voters on Rikers were able to vote. Each year, thousands of eligible New Yorkers lose their right to vote because the absentee process simply does not work in the jail setting.

The racial disparities are stark: over 92 percent of the Rikers population is non-white, and the vast majority remain eligible to vote. Without polling sites, these New Yorkers are denied a voice in the democratic process.

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