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

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

(NEW YORK, NY) — **The Vote in NYC Jails Coalition**, along with **the office of the New York City Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams, Councilmember Gale Brewer, The Legal Aid Society, LatinoJustice PRLDEF, the League of Women Voters of the City of New York, the NYC Chapter National Action Network Second Chance Committee, and the NAACP New York State Conference** 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 on this and all future election days.

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

As of today, at least 6,000 New Yorkers held at Rikers Island are potentially eligible to vote, and 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.

“For too long, incarcerated New Yorkers — the majority of whom are people of color — have been subjected to widespread disenfranchisement inside New York City jails,” said **Takeasha Newton, Lead Community Organizer in the Community Justice Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. “This is an affront to democracy that must come to an end. Polling sites must be established in city jails to ensure that no New Yorker who is eligible to vote is denied the fundamental right to make their voice heard at the ballot box. Moreover, the BOE must be held accountable for neglecting their responsibility, year after year, to guarantee ballot access for all New Yorkers, regardless of whether they are incarcerated.”

“Being incarcerated should not mean losing your voice in our democracy,” said **Cesar Ruiz, Associate Counsel at LatinoJustice PRLDEF**. “We need to establish polling sites in city jails and ensuring every eligible voter has a fair opportunity to participate. LatinoJustice will continue fighting until every New Yorker can fully exercise their constitutional right to vote.”

“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.**

“If full access to the ballot box is truly afforded to detainees to exercise that right in reality, then polling sites on Rikers Island would achieve that goal. Without polling sites only partial access to the ballot box is available and therefore eligible voters will continue to be disenfranchised,” said **Victor Pate, Vote in NYC Jails Coalition member and Co-founder of the NYC Chapter National Action Network Second Chance Committee.**

"New York City and State continue to programmatically deny New Yorkers access to the ballot box by not facilitating that access for those being detained on Riker's Island. The right to vote belongs to every eligible citizen, regardless of where they sit. New York has made this promise before, and year after year, we have watched it go unfulfilled. Today, we renew our demand to fortify our democracy by ensuring all eligible voters have a guaranteed ability to exercise that right," said **Chris Alexander, Executive Director, NAACP New York State Conference.**

Background

Since 2020, the Vote in NYC Jails Coalition has worked within Rikers Island to help people in pretrial detention 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. But despite these efforts, in June 2025, only 178 voters were able to cast their ballot on Rikers Island – a mere 2.5 percent of the nearly 6,000 potentially eligible voters. In the 2025 general election, moreover, only 335 ballots were counted.

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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The Legal Aid Society is a nonprofit law firm 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 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 the people we serve and helps improve our communities.

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