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

City Responds to Years of Legal Aid Advocacy, Announces Critical Reforms to Reduce Youth Detention and Improve Conditions at Youth Detention Facilities

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society today welcomed an [announcement](#) from the City outlining reforms to reduce youth detention and improve conditions for young people in custody at the City’s secure youth detention facilities, Horizon and Crossroads. The plan follows years of advocacy by Legal Aid, young people, and families and comes after the State declined to renew a waiver allowing the New York City Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) to exceed licensed capacity and house youth in “non-traditional” sleeping accommodations at the facilities:

“For years, we have called for meaningful action to address overcrowding and unacceptable conditions in the City’s youth detention facilities and reduce the City’s reliance on secure detention,” said **Dawne Mitchell, Chief Attorney of the Juvenile Rights Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. “The Administration’s commitment today is an important and welcome step forward on reforms we have long advocated for, including expanding community-based alternatives to detention, improving conditions and programming for detained youth, and working with court stakeholders and the newly formed City task force to safely reduce the number of young people in custody. We also appreciate that the State has finally declined to renew the waiver permitting ACS to exceed capacity and house children in unsafe conditions, underscoring the urgency of this work. The Legal Aid Society will not rest until every young person has meaningful access to alternatives to detention, and those in custody are treated with dignity and held in safe, humane conditions.”

Background

The Legal Aid Society has sounded the alarm about overcrowding and conditions in the City’s secure youth detention facilities since [2023](#), when young people represented by Legal Aid reported sleeping on cots in congregate classrooms, sleeping in hallways, and lacking consistent access to showers, restrooms, and clean clothing. State regulations mandate each youth to be assigned their own room with secure space for their possessions.

In an October 2025 [letter](#) to ACS, Legal Aid again called for immediate action, outlining specific reforms including limits on how long a young person can be left without an assigned room; prohibiting the denial of housing, education, or programming for punitive purposes; ensuring young people without rooms have access to education, programming, meals, showers, clean clothing, and secure storage; and requiring timely notice to parents, guardians, and attorneys when young people are displaced or denied programming or education.

Legal Aid has also pressed for broader reforms to reduce the City’s reliance on secure detention and increase transparency and accountability. Among the solutions Legal Aid has called for are expanding effective alternatives to detention and incarceration in partnership with the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice; regularly reporting available beds, the number of young people without assigned rooms, and facility population levels;

moving appropriate young people from secure to non-secure detention; and establishing clear written policies governing the treatment of young people who cannot be assigned a room.

The City's newly announced plan advances several of these long-sought reforms, including expanding alternatives to detention and incarceration, increasing the use of non-secure detention, and working with court stakeholders to reduce case delays and safely reduce the number of young people held in secure detention.

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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 our clients and helps improve our communities.

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