November 3, 2026

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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, including 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.

"The right to vote should not disappear simply because someone is behind bars," said **Claire Stottlemyer, Staff Attorney with The Legal Aid Society**. "Yet too many people detained in New York City jails, disproportionately Black and Latino New Yorkers, are unable to exercise their voting rights due to obstructions by the Board of Elections and Department of Correction. The City must take meaningful steps to address these longstanding failures and hold the agencies responsible, starting with establishing polling sites inside jails. "

"We all want a fair, inclusive, and just society," said **Darren Mack, Co-Director at Freedom Agenda**. "Thousands of people detained on Rikers Island are eligible to vote but unfortunately lack the resources and support needed to exercise their civic rights. Polling sites on Rikers Island would break down barriers to voting. We need this mayoral administration to take action so that every voice and every vote is valued so that no one is left behind in our city."

"Rikers Island must have its own polling site. The absentee ballot process currently in place on the island is not sufficient to meet the bar that the law requires, ballot access for all eligible New Yorkers. Too many voters are disenfranchised election after election because of barriers created by our carceral system and our election

technology," said **Lindsey Reynolds, Chair of the Criminal Justice Committee at the League of Women Voters of the City of New York.** "It's time to require the Board of Elections to bring a poll site to the thousands of eligible voters who can neither get to the polls themselves nor rely on the Department of Correction to timely and securely oversee their absentee ballots."

**Victor Pate, Co-Founder of The National Action Network NYC Chapter Second Chance Committee,** said, "We are in critical times with regards to voting rights that are under attack. We need to ensure that every vote is counted and that every eligible voter has the right to full ballot and voting access. A polling site on Rikers Island would ensure that this is a true reality even for the incarcerated. Incarcerated votes matter too!"

**Victor Pate, Co-Director of the HALT Solitary Campaign,** said, "All New Yorkers should be able to cast their vote today and in every future election. Just because someone is behind bars doesn't mean they should lose their fundamental right to vote. People incarcerated in New York City jails already have the legal right to vote. Yet, the Department of Correction and Board of Elections have failed to ensure that they can exercise that right today. As a first step, they must have a polling site at Rikers Island. And lawmakers and officials must go further to ensure that every New Yorker, including those in jails and prisons across the state can cast a ballot."

"This election day, many New Yorkers are casting their votes in important state and federal elections and hundreds of thousands have already voted early or via absentee ballot. But people incarcerated in New York City jails continue to face tremendous barriers in casting their vote, putting thousands at risk of being deprived of this fundamental right," said **Michael Klinger, Senior Jail Services Attorney with Brooklyn Defender Services.** "We join the Vote in NYC Jails Coalition to demand a polling site at Rikers Island to ensure all voters incarcerated in NYC jails are no longer disenfranchised."

"There are so many people locked up on Rikers, awaiting trial or serving sentences for low level offenses that have the legal right to vote, but don't have access," said **Council Member Tiffany Cabán.** "When 92% of people on Rikers are people of color, it is an equal access issue. The right to vote is the cornerstone of our democracy. It's time for BOE to deliver on equal ballot access to New Yorkers incarcerated on Rikers."

"As we cast our ballots during this election cycle, I want to remind New Yorkers of a simple, but often overlooked fact: One's constitutional right to vote does not disappear because someone is detained pretrial or convicted of a misdemeanor," said **Assemblymember Latrice Walker**. "Our current system, which is uneven at best, often makes it impossible for eligible incarcerated New Yorkers to exercise this fundamental right. That's why I sponsor the Free the Vote Act, which would grant eligible incarcerated New Yorkers access to polling sites in jails. It's not about creating new rights or new voters. It's about making sure that people can lawfully exercise the rights they already have. Democracy works best when participation is protected everywhere – and that includes jails from Ulster County to Rikers Island."

**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 with one simple yet powerful purpose: 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.* [www.legalaidnyc.org](http://www.legalaidnyc.org)