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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Legal Aid Society Responds to City's Updated Plan to Close Rikers Island

(NEW YORK, NY) — The Legal Aid Society released the following statement in response to the City's updated plan to close Rikers Island:

"We welcome the City's renewed commitment to closing Rikers Island. After years of delays and inaction, New Yorkers deserve a credible plan with concrete benchmarks to reduce the jail population and permanently shutter this deplorable facility.

"The pandemic alone cannot explain years of lost progress. The Adams administration abandoned the City's commitment to closure, allowing the jail population to grow while failing to invest in alternatives to incarceration. Yet coordinated efforts during the pandemic demonstrated that significant reductions in incarceration are possible when the City makes them a priority. Those lessons must guide the path forward.

"Closing Rikers must also mean ending its longstanding culture of violence, abuse, and inhumane treatment, not simply transferring those conditions to new facilities. The Department of Correction and the court-appointed remediation manager must act swiftly and boldly to correct these systemic failures and ensure they are not replicated in the borough-based jails.

"Ultimately, the City's commitment must be backed by enforceable benchmarks, meaningful investments in community-based alternatives and supportive services, fully funded public defenders, and accountability for conditions of confinement. Without these measures, the promise to close Rikers will remain unfulfilled."

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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.
www.legalaidnyc.org