

May 12, 2025

Contact:

Press@legal-aid.org

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

NYC Public Defenders, Public Advocate Williams, and Immigrant & Civil Rights Groups Join Legal Fight to Block ICE's Return to Rikers, Warn of "Irreparable Harm" from Adams Administration Order

(NEW YORK, NY) - A coalition of New York City public defender offices, immigrant and civil rights organizations, other advocacy groups, and New York City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams filed a [joint amicus brief](#) today in support of the New York City Council's lawsuit challenging the Adams Administration's Executive Order 50, which would allow U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to return to Rikers Island. The brief urges the court to block the order, warning that it would cause immediate and irreparable harm to incarcerated immigrants, their families, and entire communities across New York City.

The amicus brief argues that Executive Order 50 dangerously undermines New York City's sanctuary laws and facilitates collusion between city agencies and federal immigration enforcement. The brief draws on extensive evidence — from past abuses by ICE on Rikers to the federal government's current pattern of unconstitutional mass deportations — to demonstrate the grave risk of renewed harm.

The brief details how ICE's prior activities at Rikers violated due process and targeted New Yorkers based on racial and national origin profiling. The coalition warns that the current federal administration has gone even further, deporting individuals without hearings under the Alien Enemies Act— including to countries like El Salvador, where deportees face abuse and indefinite detention in notorious prisons.

ICE's return would also exploit the city's data systems, family visitation records, and phone surveillance to fuel deportations, particularly of Latinx youth and survivors of trauma who may qualify for immigration relief.

The amici further cite the documented history of collusion between the New York City Department of Correction and ICE, including transfers without judicial warrants and the sharing of confidential information — despite laws expressly forbidding it.

The organizations are urging the court to grant a preliminary injunction to halt Executive Order 50 before its implementation begins, emphasizing that the consequences — deportations without due process, family separations, and the erosion of trust in local government — cannot be undone.

The amicus brief is filed by The Legal Aid Society, in partnership with New York City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, The Bronx Defenders, Brooklyn Defender Services, Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort, Immigrant Defense Project, LatinoJustice, Make the Road New York, New York Civil Liberties Union, Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, New York County Defender Service, New York Legal Assistance Group, New York Immigration Coalition, Queens Defenders, and UnLocal.

“Executive Order 50 is a clear violation of New York City’s sanctuary protections and it invites a new era of racial profiling, wrongful deportations, and constitutional violations on Rikers Island,” said **Meghna Philip, Director of the Special Litigation Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. “The Trump Administration has shown it will use any pretext to carry out mass deportations — even in defiance of our Constitution and federal court rulings — and this executive order gives ICE direct access to New Yorkers in custody, their information, and their families. We’re urging the court to block this unlawful and dangerous policy before the harm becomes irreversible.”

“The mayor has long looked for every opportunity to expand collaboration with ICE, attempting to make it more acceptable to chip away at protections and deport more immigrants, regardless of criminality or illegality,” said **Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams**. “Rikers is in a constant state site of crisis and human rights violations, and inviting ICE in only compounds that harm. This mayor has already demonstrated a willingness to ignore laws he doesn’t like, especially on Rikers, and this latest example is nothing more than an attempt to aid the Trump deportation machine. Our city cannot become complicit in Trump’s harmful tactics, and I’m proud to stand firmly with our partners in this legal fight.”

“The Mayor’s Executive Order, inviting ICE back onto Rikers Island, represents a direct attack on New York’s immigrant families, masquerading as public safety, and a blatant betrayal of the Sanctuary Laws meant to protect our most vulnerable neighbors. We’ve seen this before. Under Trump’s previous administration, thousands of immigrants were funneled into ICE custody from city jails, denied due process, and torn from their communities. The consequences were immediate and severe—families shattered, lives upended, and communities pushed further into the shadows. This Executive Order threatens to revive that same machinery of harm, undermining trust and safety for all New Yorkers. As fear replaces fairness and constitutional rights are treated as optional, we must be unwavering in our defense of immigrant communities,” said **Piyali Basak, Managing Director, Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem**.

“ICE has no place at Rikers,” said **Sierra Kraft, Executive Director of the ICARE Coalition**. “Granting federal immigration enforcement access to city jails would endanger immigrant children, many of whom are survivors of trauma, violence, and systemic neglect. These young people are particularly vulnerable to wrongful deportation and the permanent loss of legal protections. ICE’s presence at Rikers would strip away due process, further push kids into the detention-to-deportation pipeline, and undermine trust in city institutions meant to safeguard their rights. We urge the court to block this dangerous policy before lasting harm is done.”

“New York City’s historic sanctuary laws ensure that the rights of New Yorkers are protected and that our city resources help all New Yorkers thrive,” said **Yasmine Farhang, Director of Advocacy at the Immigrant Defense Project**. “Executive Order 50 flies in the face of decade-old laws and our values as a city. And undoubtedly, it would fuel unprecedented abuse of power targeting New Yorkers - especially Black, Latinx and other immigrants of color. We urge all action be taken to stop this nefarious plan in its tracks.”

“By giving ICE the keys to Rikers Island, the Adams administration has skirted the city laws, cozied up to Trump, and put immigrant New Yorkers in jeopardy,” said **Amy Belsher, Director of Immigrants Rights Litigation at the New York Civil Liberties Union**. “ICE’s presence on Rikers serves no legitimate purpose and opens the door to unlawful collusion between local law enforcement and federal immigration officials in violation of our city’s well-established sanctuary protections. We urge the Court to stop this dangerous policy in its tracks — before ICE agents inflict irreparable harm on our immigrant neighbors.”

“As public defenders representing people accused of crimes in Brooklyn, we saw firsthand how ICE agents violated the rights of people in DOC custody at Rikers prior to the passage of the 2014 detainer law,” said **Lucas Marquez, Director of Civil Rights and Law Reform at Brooklyn Defenders**. “Executive Order 50 erodes New York’s sanctuary protections, and if implemented, would subject New Yorkers to unlawful profiling, surveillance, arrest, and deportation. New York City must not be complicit in ongoing violations of fundamental constitutional rights, and we urge the court to prevent this egregious harm.”

“We vehemently oppose Executive Order 50 which creates a pathway for collaboration with the federal administration to the detriment of immigrant New Yorkers. ICE has absolutely no place at Rikers Island. Our clients know firsthand how ICE engages in practices that tear families and communities apart. If ICE has an office on Rikers Island, ICE’s access to clients and client information will result in the transfer of clients to ICE detention and prevent the courts from resolving criminal cases. We must ensure that New York’s historic and vital sanctuary laws remain in place,” said **Anthony Martone, Executive Director of Queens Defenders.**

“Ten years ago, we saw the damage ICE caused at Rikers—Bronx residents transferred without warrants, families torn apart, and entire communities criminalized and driven into the shadows,” said **Anne Venhuizen, senior staff attorney in the Impact Litigation Practice at The Bronx Defenders.** “Executive Order 50 would reopen the door to those abuses, fueling unconstitutional harm and violating our city’s sanctuary laws. This isn’t about public safety—it’s a political move that puts justice, due process, and community trust at risk. We urge the court to block this order before the damage is done.”

“Our sanctuary policies were put in place to preserve city resources to improve public safety for every New York family. Executive Order 50 is not only a clear violation of these protections, but it will eliminate due process for too many of our immigrant community members, creating a detention to deportation pipeline that will tear apart families and destabilize our economy,” said **Murad Awawdeh, President and CEO, New York Immigration Coalition.** “The Trump administration is not concerned with the rule of law, public safety or the health of our economy, but simply its mass deportation agenda to be carried out at any cost regardless of the harm it inflicts on the families left behind. Too many of our immigrant community members have already been targeted and racially profiled by policies like this one. New York City must not be complicit. We urge the court to reject this dangerous policy before it’s too late.”

###

The Legal Aid Society exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For nearly 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. <https://www.legalaidnyc.org>