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*****For Immediate Release*****

Brooklyn Defender Services and New York County Defender Services Joint Statement on William Johnstone, the Sixth Person to Die in New York City Jails in 2023

(BROOKLYN, NY) – Brooklyn Defender Services and New York County Defender Services released the following joint statement following [reports](#) of the death of William Johnstone, a client of Brooklyn Defender Services and New York County Defender Services, who was the sixth person to die in Department of Correction (DOC) custody this year:

“We are devastated by the death of William Johnstone, who died on Saturday after being incarcerated at Rikers Island on unaffordable bail since late March. We mourn his passing alongside his loved ones and all who are affected by his death.

It is abhorrent that twenty-five New Yorkers have lost their lives in DOC custody since the beginning of 2022. We are angered and saddened that the Department of Correction’s failure to protect the health and safety of people in its custody has resulted in the death of yet another New Yorker, the third in the past three weeks.

Mr. Johnstone’s death comes less than a week after the release of the latest federal monitor report that details the countless known harms inflicted upon New Yorkers incarcerated in NYC jails. The monitor states, ‘Real people are experiencing real trauma and pain and, in some cases, are suffering irreparable injuries and death.’ We cannot allow the suffering and death to continue, and we demand DOC be held accountable.

Despite the widely-known dangerous and deadly conditions, prosecutors and judges continue to condemn people to Rikers Island pre-trial on unaffordable bail, and NYC continues to criminalize poverty and mental illness. Before another life is lost, every judge, every prosecutor, every elected official must take decisive action to reduce the jail population on Rikers Island.”

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