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Criminal Justice Advocates Call on State to Protect Prison Population as COVID-19 Spreads Statewide

NEW YORK – New Yorkers United for Justice Chief Strategist **Khalil A. Cumberbatch**, a formerly incarcerated New Yorker, issued the following statement:

“As COVID-19 spreads across the state, we urge New York’s public officials, the Department of Corrections, and local entities responsible for health and safety in prisons, jails, and other detention facilities used by the criminal justice system, to ensure incarcerated New Yorkers are receiving the proper preventive measures as well as timely testing and care for this illness.”

“New York’s incarcerated populations are particularly vulnerable due to close confinement and, too often, subpar conditions. This makes for enhanced susceptibility to contagions and infectious diseases, and an outbreak would exacerbate an already stretched prison health system. Protocols must be put in place to make sure the coronavirus does not spread in our detention facilities—and any guidance shared with shelters or supporting housing programs should also be communicated to our correctional facilities.”

“We urge officials to ensure any suspected cases must be immediately tested, and prison staff and visiting family members must also be screened to try and keep this virus out—and we need measures in place for when an incarcerated individual does test positive. We also must honor the right to access to counsel – and the courts must ensure that cases do not proceed to critical phases without appropriate attorney-client consultation.”

****Khalil A. Cumberbatch is available for interviews to discuss COVID-19 coronavirus and incarceration****