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For More Information Contact: Reynolds Graves rgraves@skdknick.com 313.205.8675

ON ABC'S "THIS WEEK WITH GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS," NEW YORKERS UNITED FOR JUSTICE SENIOR ADVISOR TOPEKA K. SAM CALLS COVID-19 OUTBREAK IN NY, NATIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEMS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

Sam, a formerly incarcerated New Yorker, tells Stephanopoulos: "Whether people are housed in a dorm setting or a cell, there's no such thing as social distancing inside prisons."

*****TOPEKA K. SAM IS AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEWS*****

During an appearance on [ABC's "This Week With George Stephanopoulos,"](#) New Yorkers United for Justice Senior Advisor **Topeka K. Sam** referred to a potential COVID-19 outbreak in correctional facilities as a public health crisis - and called for urgent action to protect New York's prison population and that of the country. Since her release, Ms. Sam has used her experience to partner with advocates and officials on both sides of the aisle to push for improved jail and prison conditions, especially for women, and solutions to address mass incarceration as a whole, citing public health and public safety as well as compassion and a culture of second chances. This has taken on greater urgency as the system grapples with the COVID-19 novel coronavirus crisis.

"Mass incarceration is a public health issue," said Sam. "And I'm glad that we are now looking at prisons in a different way, and the people that are actually in them."

For many weeks, New Yorkers United for Justice has urged Governor Cuomo and state officials to release a coordinated and comprehensive plan focused on protecting the state's vulnerable criminal justice system population - from pretrial through incarceration and reentry - from exposure to the coronavirus. This plan must include reducing the overall population through all means available, including the Governor's substantial powers of clemency. Such measures are being urgently embraced by Republican and Democratic governors alike, including Gov. Andy Beshear, D-KY; Gov. Mike DeWine, R-OH; and Gov. JB Pritzker, D-IL.

In addition to serving as Senior Advisor at New Yorkers United for Justice, Topeka K. Sam is the Founder and Executive Director of The Ladies of Hope Ministries – The LOHM – whose mission is to help disenfranchised and marginalized women and girls transition back into society through resources and access to high-quality education, entrepreneurship, spiritual empowerment, advocacy and housing. She is also the co-founder of HOPE HOUSE NYC – a safe housing space for women and girls. In 2018, she became Director for the #Dignity Campaign at @cut50 where she has led a national effort to passing legislation in 8 states to make sure that the conditions of confinement are more humane for women and girls.

Sam serves on the board of directors for Grassroots Leadership, and the Coalition for Public Safety and is the first formerly incarcerated person on the board of The Marshall Project.

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About New Yorker United for Justice (NYUJ):

New Yorkers United for Justice is a statewide coalition comprised of local and national non-profit organizations committed to supporting a movement that will bring much-needed criminal justice reform to New York State and ensure that policies promote safety and fairness. NYUJ aims for legislative urgency to fix a broken criminal justice system that punishes the poor and communities of color, tears families apart, and makes New Yorkers less safe. NYUJ believes that a system that ensures equal access to justice for anyone accused in New York State, regardless of age, race, ethnicity or social economic status, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin or religion, must be the standard.