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Public Defender Service Calls for the Immediate Release of all Persons Detained at the D.C. Jail

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WASHINGTON –

For years, the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, along with other legal and grass-roots organizations, has called out and challenged the D.C. Department of Corrections for its horrific treatment of nearly exclusively Black and Brown people detained at the D.C. Jail. The inhumane conditions have included long-term solitary confinement for people with no disciplinary issues, lack of running water, full illumination of cells for 24-hours per day resulting in sleep deprivation, cells soiled with feces and blood, lack of air conditioning during the summer and heat during the winter, lack of proper medical care, failure to provide mental health treatment, and physical and mental abuse by correctional officers of people in their custody.

Through the advocacy of the members of this coalition, the U.S. Attorney's Office and D.C. Superior Court judges have become fully aware of the brutality a person faces when prosecutors request and judges order detention at the D.C. Jail. But only when a federal judge was unhappy with the way that January 6 defendants have been treated was any action taken. Now the U.S. Marshals Service has determined that they will no longer allow people under their care to be held at the D.C. Jail.

This sudden epiphany by stakeholders only after White people complained of conditions at the D.C. Jail is a clear example of the historic and systemic racism that plagues the carceral system. Prosecutors continue to seek detention in D.C. Superior Court, and judges callously continue to hold clients under conditions that have been deemed too harsh for people in federal custody.

“We refuse to stay silent and call on the U.S. Attorney's Office to stop seeking clients' detention and the D.C. Superior Court judges to take immediate action and release clients who are facing these unconstitutional and inhumane conditions,” said Avis E. Buchanan, Director, Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia.